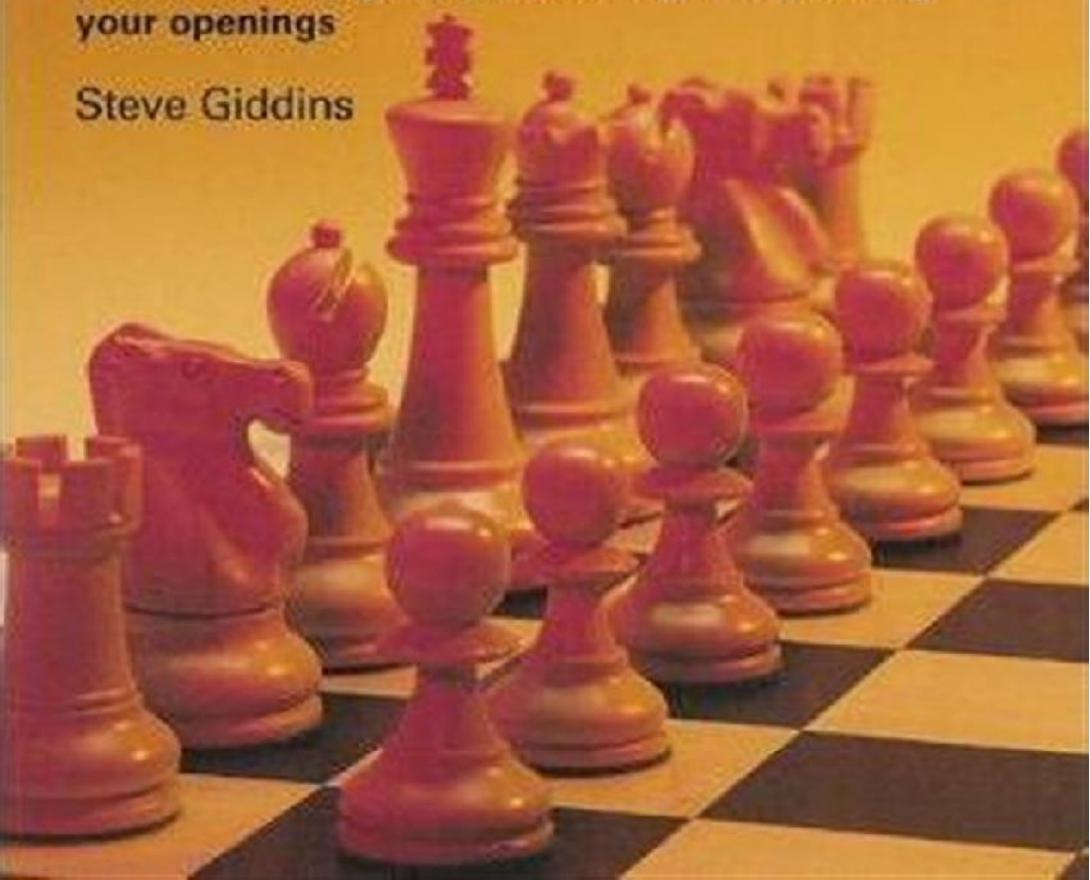


GAMBIT

How to Build Your Chess Opening Repertoire

A user-friendly guide to choosing and planning
your openings

Steve Giddins



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Managing Director: GM Murray Chandler

Chess Director: GM John Nunn

Editorial Director: FM Graham Burgess

German Editor: WFM Petra Nunn

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Symbols

+	check	Wcht	world team championship
++	double check	Ech	European championship
#	checkmate	Echt	European team championship
!!	brilliant move	ECC	European Clubs Cup
!	good move	Ct	candidates event
!?	interesting move	IZ	interzonal event
?!	dubious move	Z	zonal event
?	bad move	●L	olympiad
??	blunder	jr	junior event
+	White is winning	wom	women's event
±	White is much better	rpd	rapidplay game
±	White is slightly better	tt	team tournament
=	equal position	corr.	correspondence game
+	Black is slightly better	1-0	the game ends in a win for White
+	Black is much better	½-½	the game ends in a draw
-+	Black is winning	0-1	the game ends in a win for Black
Ch	championship	(n)	<i>n</i> th match game
Cht	team championship	(D)	see next diagram
Wcb	world championship		

Introduction

Openings: Can't Live with 'em, Can't Live without 'em

Openings are an area of the game with which most chess-players have a love-hate relationship. On the one hand, almost all serious chess-players take a great interest in the opening phase of the game. We spend a very large proportion of our chess study time on openings, and an equally large proportion of our chess book money goes on opening books. Although many of us would claim that we regret the large role played by opening theory in modern chess, the hard facts tend to give the lie to this. The failure of Fischer-random chess to attract much interest from the great majority of us attests to the fact that, whatever we might like to tell ourselves, most of us have little real desire to escape from the vast edifice that is modern opening theory.

However, on the other hand, we are almost all sure that openings are to blame for the majority of our defeats, and that we would be much stronger players "if only I knew my openings properly". Just think of all the times you have heard team-mates and friends complaining after losing a game. How often have you heard them say "Well, I lost because I misplayed the rook

ending" or "If only I could play fixed pawn-structures better", or something similar? If your team-mates and friends are anything like mine, the answer will be "Hardly ever". Instead, what one hears in the great majority of cases is something like "He knew the opening better than me", or "It's that opening. I'll have to give it up; I always lose with it".

The truth of the matter is that the great majority of players below master level spend a disproportionate amount of their chess time on openings, yet achieve very little in the way of concrete benefits. There are a number of reasons for this – changing openings too often, over-concentration on rote learning of variations, at the expense of understanding the positions, too great a willingness to trust authority rather than using their own judgement, etc. Above all, too few players understand how to study openings, and how to form an opening repertoire. The negative results of this extend to the whole of one's game. Because we spend so much time on openings, we neglect other areas of the game. In addition, when we lose a game, we frequently blame the opening, decide to learn something else, and so spend yet more time on openings, oblivious to the fact that the real reason we lost the

game in question was because we misplayed the ending!

The aim of this book is to try to help readers rectify this sorry state of affairs, by ensuring that their opening studies are conducted efficiently and effectively. With properly-directed efforts, it is not so difficult to have a reliable and effective opening repertoire, in much less time than most of us habitually spend on openings. Of course, having such a repertoire is not going to stop us losing games, nor will it ensure that we never emerge from the opening with a bad position. However, it will reduce the number of times these things happen, and it should also help us to focus our attention on the real cause of our defeats, which in practice is rarely the opening. One thing the book does not attempt to do is to recommend any specific opening repertoire *per se*, still less one that guarantees you a win in under 20 moves against any defence - there are plenty of other authors out there who offer such miracle cures, if that is what you are seeking. Instead, what I have tried to do is to help you decide for yourself which openings to play, but in so doing, I have discussed a large number of specific opening systems, and my opinions on these will be apparent from the text.

You may legitimately be wondering what qualifies me to give advice on such a subject. I would freely admit that for much of my chess career, I had no idea at all how to approach the problem of openings. Up until 1993, by which time I was in my 30s and

rated about 2250, I had an extremely weak opening repertoire. In fact, I had almost no repertoire at all, because I chopped and changed openings virtually on a monthly basis. What I did have was a very good all-round knowledge of lots of openings, chiefly because I happen to be blessed with an excellent memory. However, there was no single opening which I had played more than a handful of times, or of which I could claim to have any real understanding. And, inevitably, every time I lost a game, I put it down to the opening, made a mental note not to play that line again, and consigned my scoresheet to the dustbin.

My first steps on the path to righteousness came when I started living and working in Moscow in late 1992, and was exposed for the first time in my life to an experienced chess trainer. I still recall my embarrassment when he asked me to write out my whole opening repertoire, including which lines I played against each main black defence, etc., and I was forced to confess that in all but one or two cases, I simply could not say! I would just make my mind up at the board, probably picking some line which I happened to have seen in a game in a recent magazine. After rolling his eyes in disbelief for a minute or two, he gave me a severe dose of the "every Russian schoolboy knows better than that" routine, and then we started some serious opening work for the first time in my life. Under his guidance, I soon began to develop a proper, cohesive repertoire, and within a couple of

years I already had a whole series of lines which I had studied, played and analysed enough to have developed at least a modicum of understanding of what I was doing. Needless to say, my confidence soared, and my results followed suit.

Of course, not many players have the opportunity to gain access to an experienced Soviet-era chess trainer. My aim in this book is to try at least partially to bridge the gap, by passing on to my readers some of the things I have learned about opening preparation, and so to enable them to develop a well-balanced and effective repertoire with a minimum of effort. We all enjoy chess more when we are winning, and while having a decent opening repertoire is not in itself a cast-iron guarantee of success, it is certainly a very good step in the right direction.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Graham Burgess, for editorial assistance, and for the drunken evening in Gausdal which spawned the idea for this book. Many players, inadvertently or otherwise, gave invaluable insights into their own approach to openings, and their contributions are acknowledged in the appropriate place in the text. By far my greatest debt is to IM Igor Belov, my chess trainer when I lived in Moscow, and the man who first taught me the difference between a serious chess-player and a player who works seriously at chess.

Finally, this book is dedicated to my friends Dave, Roger, and the late John; without their generous encouragement of an enthusiastic kid at the local chess club, this book would never have found its author.

1 The Keys to Successful Opening Play

In his book *The Slav*, GM Matthew Sadler enumerated three key elements in successful opening play:

- 1) Knowing the aims of the opening;
- 2) Knowing the value of move-orders;
- 3) Understanding typical positions.

In this excellent advice, with which I concur 100%, there are a number of things I should like to comment on in more detail.

Fishing for Compliments

The first thing to note is that memorization of opening lines is not mentioned at all. Contrary to what one may think, memorizing variations is a relatively small factor in enabling one to play an opening successfully. It is far more important to understand the positional and tactical themes of the opening, and to appreciate what you should be aiming for in the given position. It is rather like the popular aphorism, beloved of humanitarian relief agencies: "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man how to fish, and you feed him for life." Chess openings are rather similar. Teach a player a series of opening moves, and you enable

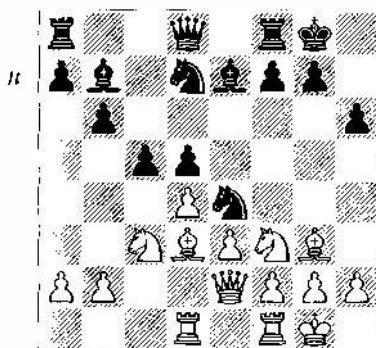
him to play well in one specific position. Teach him why the moves are played, and you enable him to play well in lots of positions. The player who depends entirely on his memory, with little real understanding of the ideas behind the moves, will be completely at sea the moment his opponent deviates from the 'book', or he reaches the end of his memorized line. By contrast, the player who understands the opening will be able to find the best move, or at least a reasonable move, even if he is blissfully unaware of what Grandmaster Anonovich recommended in his latest openings book.

The following game is an excellent illustration of the value of understanding an opening, rather than merely learning lines by heart. It also proves that even at the highest level, understanding is more important than mere knowledge.

Lautier – Short

Pamplona 1999/00

1 d4 e6 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3 c4 d5 4 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$
5 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ h6 6 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 0-0 7 e3 b6 8 $\mathbb{Q}d3$
 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 9 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ c5 11 $\mathbb{Q}e2$
 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 12 cxd5 exd5 13 $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ (D)



This position had arisen a number of times prior to this game, with White's 13th move having emerged as $13\text{...}\mathbb{Q}\text{d}1$ White.

Vyzhmanavin had played $13\text{...}\mathbb{Q}\text{d}1$ several times, with excellent results. For example,

the advantage following $13\text{...}\mathbb{Q}\text{d}6$
 $14\text{dxc5}\mathbb{Q}\text{xc3}15\text{bxc3}\mathbb{Q}\text{xc5}16\mathbb{Q}\text{d}4$. Another move which had been tried was 13...

$\mathbb{Q}\text{xc5}\text{bxc5}16\mathbb{Q}\text{h}1$

hanging liability in Kramnik-Yusupov, Madrid 1998.

Instead,

the new move for Black:

$13\text{...}\mathbb{Q}\text{c}8!$

For our purposes, his comments in *New in Chess* (1/2000, p. 10) are more significant:

"Although I had seen [the Kramnik-Yusupov game], I had forgotten everything. I normally try to work out things by general principles. If I can't understand why I am putting my pieces on

certain squares, how did Short's application of general principles lead to his choice of move? Well, it is obvious that the opposition of the white rook on $\mathbf{d}1$ and the black queen on $\mathbf{d}8$ is awkward for Black. As we saw from the Vyzhmanavin examples above, the pin on the $\mathbf{d}5$ -pawn means that Black must take on $\mathbf{c}3$ before recapturing by 13...

so Short came up with the idea of simply moving his queen off the \mathbf{d} -file. In this respect,

his queen's rook on $\mathbf{d}1$, rather than his king's rook, helps Short's idea; the king's rook on $\mathbf{d}1$, invite $14\mathbb{Q}\text{ac}1$. Another factor in favour of $13\text{...}\mathbb{Q}\text{c}8$ is that once the knight leaves $\mathbf{d}7$, able to go to $\mathbf{e}6$, a typical black queen in structures where he has hanging pawns on $\mathbf{d}5$ and $\mathbf{c}5$.

Short's move had an immediate effect, because Lautier thought for a long time and failed to come up with an effective

$14\mathbb{Q}\text{b}1$

Short pointed out that if White plays *à la* Vyzhmanavin with 14dxc5 , Black has $14\text{...}\mathbb{Q}\text{xc3}15\text{bxc3}$ and now $15\text{...}\mathbb{Q}\text{xc5}$ is possible. Black will follow up with $...Qe4$ and $...Qf6$, excellent play.

$14\text{...}\mathbb{Q}\text{d}615\mathbb{Q}\text{c}2$

The battery along the $\mathbf{b}1$ - $\mathbf{h}7$ diagonal is not very effective here, Black is never likely to be in real danger of being mated.

$15\text{...}\mathbb{Q}\text{c}816\mathbb{Q}\text{e}5\mathbb{Q}\text{e}617\text{dxc5bxc5}$

It is clear that Black has solved his development problems very well and has no difficulties at all here. In fact, Short was already feeling confident enough to turn down a draw offer at this point, and he went on to win a highly impressive game.

To my mind, this is a really excellent example of the value of understanding one's chosen opening, rather than merely learning variations. Thanks to his many years of playing the black side of the QGD, Short was able, over the board, to find an effective answer to a line which had caused significant trouble for Black. His words in the note to Black's 13th move are especially noteworthy.

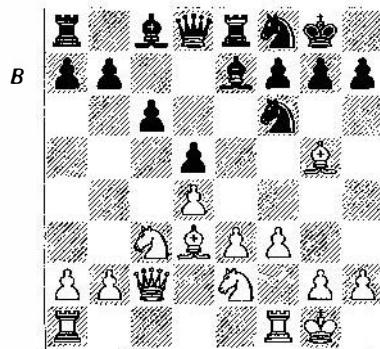
Order out of Chaos

The second of Sadler's three elements is knowing the value of move-orders. This is so important that I shall devote a whole chapter to it later in the book. For the present, suffice it to say that it is no good knowing an opening really well, if you then play a move-order which allows your opponent to trick you into some other line that you know nothing about. In preparing our openings, therefore, we must take account of move-order subtleties and transpositions.

As an example, let's suppose that you are starting your opening repertoire from scratch, and decide to open 1 d4. Against the QGD, you have been very impressed by a couple of games you have seen where White played the Exchange Variation with $\mathbb{Q}ge2$, and

you decide that you would like to play this line.

You therefore spend several weeks studying the position after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4 cxd5 exd5 5 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 6 e3 0-0 7 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}ge2$ c6 9 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 10 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 11 f3 (D).



By the time you have studied such classics as Botvinnik-Keres, USSR Ch (Moscow) 1952, and Kasparov-Short, London PCA Wch (15) 1993, and others, you are all ready to crush any unsuspecting QGD player with a mighty pawn avalanche c4-e5-f4-f5, etc.

You then turn to the line 1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 c6. After some consideration, you decide that you really like some of Kasparov's wins in the line 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ b6 4 a3, so you decide to avoid the Nimzo-Indian and play 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ instead. Being a thorough chap, you do not forget to prepare something against the Bogo-Indian, 3... $\mathbb{Q}b4+$, as well.

Eventually, the great day comes when you wheel out your d-pawn in a tournament game. The game starts 1

d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 e6 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$, but now the unspeakable rogue plays not 3...b6, nor 3... $\mathbb{Q}b4+$, but 3...d5. Suddenly the awful truth dawns. If you go back to a QGD with 4 $\mathbb{Q}c3$, you cannot reach your beloved $\mathbb{Q}e2$ Exchange Variation, because your knight is already committed to f3. You could play 4 g3, transposing into a Catalan, but this is an opening you have never studied, and some of the lines can be pretty complicated, especially those where Black takes on c4 and tries to cling onto the pawn – hardly the sort of thing you want to play without preparation. So, the only alternative is the ultra-tame 4 e3, immediately forego-ing any pretensions to an opening ad-vantage, and certainly not what you had in mind when you were analysing all those Kasparov crushes.

In short, you have been ‘move-ordered’. When you decided on your various opening choices, you failed to check whether any of them were inconsistent with one another, and now you have paid the price.

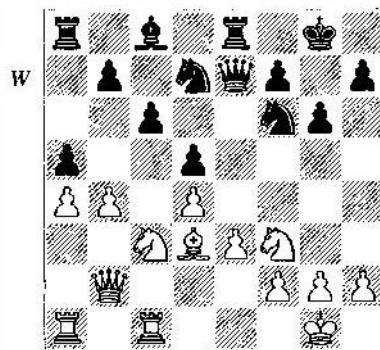
Don't let it happen to you! Hopefully, after reading Chapter 5, you will be on the business end of any move-order trickery which happens to be floating about.

Typical, Just Typical

The third element is understanding typical positions. This is something which involves going well beyond opening study per se, and instead learning to play the types of middlegame and endgame which arise from the opening

you have chosen. This is probably the main area where players below master level fall down. It is relatively easy to understand the main points of an opening, to master its move-orders and to memorize a few key lines. It is far more difficult to develop a really good understanding of the typical middle-game and endgame positions.

As a first example of the importance of really understanding typical positions, I should like to consider the following position.



Kramnik – Timman
Belgrade 1995

The position is easily recognizable as having arisen from a Queen's Gambit Declined, Exchange Variation. Most strong players will be aware that White's principal plan in this structure is the so-called Minority Attack, whereby the pawn is advanced to b4 and b5, with the aim of capturing on c6 and leaving Black with a backward pawn. In the diagram position, therefore, White of course played 16 b5,

didn't he? Well, no, actually he didn't. Kramnik played...

16 bxa5!

...and wrote "A typical decision, since 16 b5 c5 does not promise White as much as he would like". This is an example of **really** understanding typical positions. The point is that after 16 b5 c5 White can isolate the black d-pawn by 17 dxc5. However, it is one of the more subtle aspects of these structures that IQP positions are usually not so good for White when his b-pawn has advanced to b5. This is because he has weakened his c3- and c4-squares, which Black can frequently exploit for counterplay. For example, a knight can come to c4, supported by the IQP. or Black can put his rooks on the c-file and pressurize White in that way. Another point is that White is weak on the dark squares on the queenside, particularly b4, thanks to the fact that he has no dark-squared bishop and the black a5-pawn controls h4. An incursion by the black queen on b4 could be rather awkward for White, especially if the white rook has left the a-file, with the result that an exchange on b4 leaves his a-pawn undefended.

For all of these reasons, Kramnik instead switched plans.

16... $\mathbb{E}xa5$

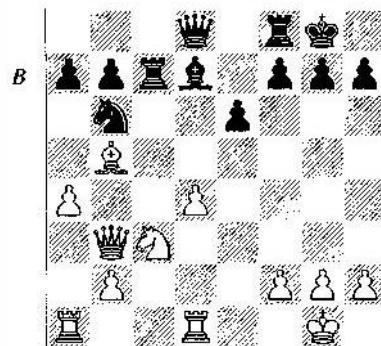
Kramnik now revealed the point of his alternative plan:

17 $\mathbb{Q}d2$

The intention is to seize the c5- and b6-squares by playing by $\mathbb{Q}b3$, a5 and $\mathbb{Q}a4$. One can see that White has completely reversed the trend on the queenside – instead of White being weak on

the dark squares, as would have been the case in the line after 16 b5, he now threatens to get a bind himself on those very same dark squares. A few moves later, having used the queen-side threats to disrupt Black's forces, Kramnik switched plans again and broke through in the centre with the advance e4, soon achieving a winning attack.

The next example features a little-known subtlety in a typical IQP position.



Stanec – Beliavsky
Graz 1996

Unlike most IQP positions, where White seeks to turn his extra space into a kingside initiative, here he has played mainly on the queenside. However, such a plan is rarely justified, unless Black has weakened his queen-side structure in some way. Here he has not, and already White's hopes should be connected with equalizing by a timely d5 advance. However,

Beliavsky forestalled this plan with an excellent sequence:

18... $\mathbb{Q}c6!$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $bxc6!$

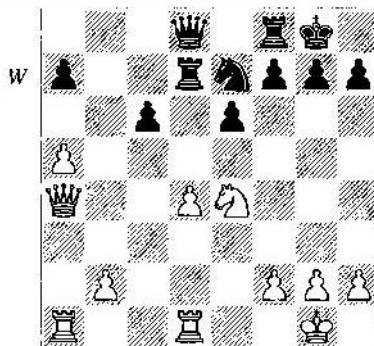
It is the last move which is the key idea. At first sight, it looks crazy for Black voluntarily to accept a weak, isolated pawn on an open file. In reality, however, the c6-pawn is much less weak than it appears, and it is the white pawns on d4 and b2 which are the more vulnerable. Meanwhile, the c6-pawn ensures that White will never be able to liquidate his IQP by advancing d5. Such a structural transformation is a known idea in such IQP positions, although it is not dealt with in most books (Alexander Baburin's *Winning Pawn Structures* and Dražen Marović's *Understanding Pawn Play in Chess* being notable exceptions). The first high-level example of which I am aware is Lasker-Capablanca, Havana Wch (10) 1921, although in that game, the full didactic value of Black's idea was lost after a few moves, when White exchanged pieces on d5, permitting Black to eliminate the extra pawn-island by ...cxd5. In the present game, the c6-pawn survives for the long term, and Beliavsky gives a textbook demonstration of the advantages of the black structure.

20 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 21 a5??

This weakens the a-pawn and drives the knight where it is going anyway.

21... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ (D)

The knight is ideally placed on e7, defending the c6-pawn and preparing a later jump to f5, attacking the d4 weakness. The remainder of the game is not really within the scope of the

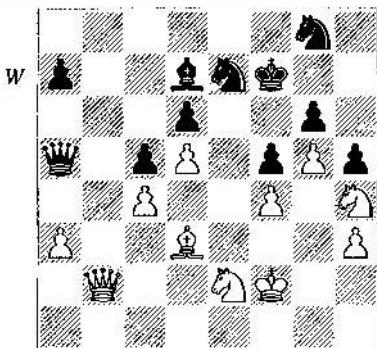


present book, so I give the concluding moves without further comment.

23 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 25 h3 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ f6 29 a6 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ h5 31 h4 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 32 g3 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ e5 39 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}db5$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}a2$ $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 43 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 4 0-1

These two examples both illustrate subtle aspects of a typical pawn-structure. If you play openings which lead to these structures (for example, if you play the Queen's Gambit as either White or Black), your success rate will improve greatly if you develop a familiarity with such typical plans and positional ideas as those shown above.

The depth of some grandmasters' understanding of typical middlegame and endgame positions from their favourite openings is quite remarkable. In this respect, I am reminded of a story quoted by Alexander Kotov, concerning former world champion Mikhail Botvinnik.



Botvinnik – Matulović
Palma de Mallorca 1967

This was the adjourned position. Writing in his classic *Think Like a Grandmaster*, Kotov told the following tale: “During the break from play, Botvinnik remarked to Smyslov and me, ‘The position is an easy win for White. At the appropriate moment, there is a decisive knight sacrifice on g6 or h5. I analysed similar endings when I was preparing for my match with Tal’”. Sure enough, when play resumed, Botvinnik quickly wrapped up the full point, thanks to a sacrifice on g6:

43 ♕f1 ♜c8 44 ♜g3 ♜d7 45 ♜e2 ♜a4 46 ♜f2 ♜e8 47 ♜xg6! ♜xd5

Or: 47...♜xg6 48 ♜xf5; 47...♜xg6 48 ♜xh5.

48 ♜xh5 ♜de7 49 ♜g7+

This is a perfect illustration of the depth of GM preparation. The ending above had arisen from a Benoni, a favourite opening of Tal’s. Clearly, when preparing to face Tal in their world championship matches in 1960 and

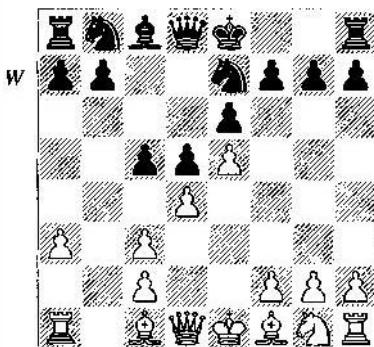
1961, Botvinnik’s study of the Benoni had gone way beyond simply analysing the opening sequences themselves. Instead, he had analysed characteristic middlegames and endgames arising from the Benoni, and had worked out the typical methods of play in such positions. A small piece of that knowledge was demonstrated in the Matulović game.

So how does one develop such knowledge? Well, firstly, not by memorizing variations – no amount of rote learning will enable you to find moves like Kramnik’s 16 bxa5, or Beliavsky’s 19...hxc6, let alone Botvinnik’s endgame plan against Matulović. Similarly, most opening books will not teach you such things. It is true that many opening monographs nowadays include an introductory chapter on positional themes of the opening, and typical do’s and don’ts, but these are of necessity brief and usually only scratch the surface of the subject. Instead, the main method of acquiring such knowledge consists in studying well-annotated games by players who specialize in the opening in which you are interested. I should like to present an example from some work I once did along these lines.

Ever since I started to have a consistent and identifiable opening repertoire, my defence to 1 e4 has been the French, and, more specifically, the Winawer Variation:

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜c3 ♜b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♜xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♜e7 (D)

In this opening, Black takes some clear positional risks. He places his



central pawns on light squares and then gives up his dark-squared bishop, thus leaving himself with severely weakened dark squares. In return, however, he doubles the white pawns and induces White partially to block the position with e5, thereby robbing the bishop-pair of much of their effectiveness. In the ensuing middlegame, the strategic battle usually revolves around White's attempts to open the position for his bishops, and, in particular, to get his dark-squared bishop into the game effectively, often via the a3-f8 diagonal. Black, meanwhile, generally struggles to keep the position closed, often playing ...c4, and trying to pressurize White's weakened pawn-structure.

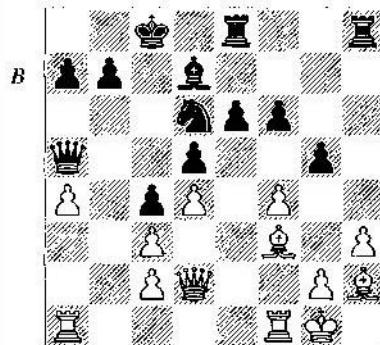
Sometime around 1994, after losing a couple of nasty games on the black side of this position, I concluded that I needed to improve my understanding of these typical Winawer middlegames. In order to do so, I decided to analyse some games played by the main masters of this opening, Botvinnik and Uhlmann. The latter, in

particular, played almost nothing but the French throughout a forty-year career. As luck would have it, some ten years ago he published a book of his best French Defence games, under the modest title *Ein Lehen lang Französisch – richtig gespielt!* ("A lifelong French – correctly played!"). An expanded English translation of the book is available, entitled *Winning With the French*. I naturally used this book as the basis for my work, and one of the games I studied closely was his famous victory over Bobby Fischer:

Fischer – Uhlmann

Buenos Aires 1960

7 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{A}d7$ 8 a4 $\mathbb{W}a5$ 9 $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{B}be6$ 10 $\mathbb{A}d3$ c4 11 $\mathbb{A}e2$ f6 12 $\mathbb{A}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 13 0-0 0-0-0 14 $\mathbb{A}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}ce7$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{W}de8$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ hxg6 17 exf6 gxf6 18 h3 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 19 $\mathbb{A}h2$ g5 20 f4 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 21 $\mathbb{A}f3$ (D)



Here we see a typical Winawer struggle. Black has played ...c4, castled into (relative) safety on the queenside, and has broken up White's centre with

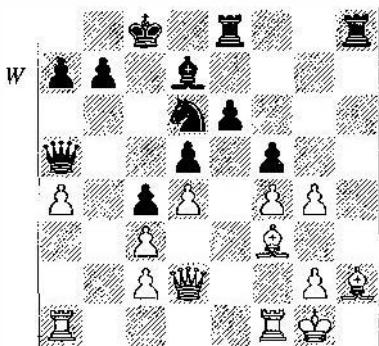
...f6. With his central pawn-mass and excellently placed knight on d6, Black has very good prospects, if he can keep White's bishops from getting active. This, however, is looking difficult, as it appears impossible to stop the dark-squared bishop on h2 becoming tremendously active after either ...gxf4 by Black, or fxe5 by White.

This is clearly a critical moment in the game, and Uhlmann rose to the occasion, with a move which every French player should remember:

21...g4!!

With this wonderful sacrifice, Uhlmann underlines the main theme of Black's play in such Winawer positions – the fight to tame the white bishops. White cannot take with the bishop, because after 22...Qe4 his queenside would collapse. He is therefore forced to take with the pawn:

22hxg4 f5! (D)

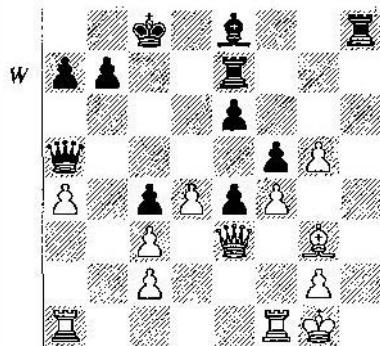


The point. Black nails to the spot, and in so doing condemns the h2-bishop to a life of monastic inactivity behind the cloisters. Although

White has a protected passed pawn on g5, it is clear that the pawn is going nowhere, lacking as it does any support from the white pieces. White's position is now totally passive, and he can only watch as Black strengthens his grip and prepares the final assault.

23 g5 Ae7 24 Ag3 Ae8 25 We3 Qe4 26 Axe4 dxe4 (D)

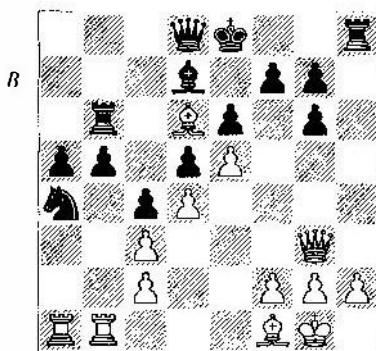
Not, of course, the awful positional blunder 26...fxe4??, which would negate the whole of Black's previous play by allowing White to free his entombed bishop with 27 f5.



27 Af2 Ah7 28 Bfb1 Wd5 29 We1 Bh1 30 Wxh1 e3+ 31 Qg1 Bxh1+ 32 Bxb1 c2 33 Ab5 Bxb5 34 axb5 Wxb5 35 Ae1 a5 36 Axe2 a4 37 Bxe6 a3 38 g6 Wd7 39 Ae5 b6 40 Bh4 a2 41 Ae1 Wg7 42 Ba1 Wxg6 0-1

This is a magnificent example of one of Black's most important strategic goals in the Winawer – white bishop-pair. Another typical Winawer theme on which I found some tremendously instructive material is the positional exchange sacrifice. The

following example by Botvinnik is a classic.



Tolush – Botvinnik
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1945

Here White has managed to get his dark-squared bishop into Black's position, but while he has been doing so, Black has captured the white a-pawn, and has a potentially dangerous pawn phalanx on the queenside. Botvinnik now removed White's most active piece with a thematic exchange sacrifice:

21...♝xd6! 22 exd6 ♜c6

For his exchange, Black already has one extra pawn, and the d6-pawn is going to drop sooner or later. In addition, the blocked nature of the position means that the white rooks have no open files along which to penetrate, whereas Black's pieces (especially his knight) have far greater activity. Finally, Black also has the long-term plan of advancing either his queenside majority, or playing ...f6 and ...e5 and using his central pawn-mass. White,

meanwhile, has no active plan. The game continued:

23 h3 ♜d7 24 ♜el ♜h4

White's only remaining active piece is his queen, so Botvinnik seeks to exchange that as well. If White acquiesces, Black will have a completely free hand.

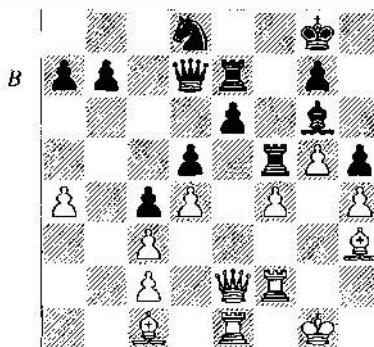
25 ♜e5 ♜f6 26 ♜g3 ♜h4!

This stops ♜e3-f3.

27 ♜e3 ♜f4

Black has a total grip on the position, and now plans ...♜h4 to force off the queens. He followed up with ...b4 and won easily.

The following is another instructive example of Black's positional exchange sacrifice in such positions, this time with some slightly different themes:



Byvshov – Geller
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1952

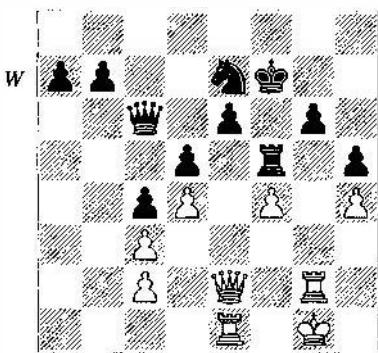
Once again, we have many of the typical features of the Winawer mid-game. On this occasion, however, it

is White's light-squared bishop which is the more active, whereas its fellow prelate on c1 presents a sorry spectacle behind the fixed white pawns. Geller dealt with the light-square pressure by offering the exchange:

34... $\mathbb{B}f7!$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{B}xf5$

As in Tolush-Botvinnik above, the main factor justifying Black's sacrifice is the blocked nature of the position, which denies the white rooks any scope. An additional factor this time is the weakness of the light squares in the white position. Once again, there is little White can do, and his thrashing about soon led to a lost position:

36 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{B}f7$ 37 $\mathbb{B}ef1$ $\mathbb{W}xa4$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 39 g6 $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 40 $gxf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 42 $\mathbb{B}g2$ g6 (D)



Black has a pawn for the exchange, an iron grip on the light squares, and the now-familiar pawn phalanx on the queenside. He now prepared ...b5-b4, and went on to win comfortably.

I hope you can see how studying these and other examples brings out

the positional themes underlying this middlegame structure. By performing such work, I was able to learn a great deal about how to handle these positions, and my results with the Winawer improved markedly. If you wish to improve your play in your favourite opening, this is the sort of work you should try to do. Identify some leading players who specialize in that opening, and study their best games, preferably with their own notes. When you come across an interesting or instructive moment, make a note of the position and the key moves, particularly emphasizing the ideas and themes which support the move played. By so doing, you will gradually build up your understanding of the typical positions reached from your opening, their characteristic plans and ideas, tactical devices, etc. Such knowledge does not go out of date, nor is its value restricted to only one given position. If you continue to work in this way on your opening systems, you will soon find that your results will improve significantly, and your all-round middlegame and endgame play will benefit.

All Openings are Sound

Before leaving the subject of successful opening play, there is one other point I wish to make, by way of supplementing Sadler's three principles. This is to say that by and large, it is a mistake to think that one opening is objectively better than another. At first sight, this may seem a radical claim,

but it is one supported by most strong players. For example, consider the following exchange between interviewer Bachar Kouatly and Garry Kasparov, on a 1991 GM Video production concerning the final Kasparov-Karpov match:

Kouatly: "You once said that the Grünfeld Defence is 100% sound" (emphatic nod from Kasparov). "So why then, did you also play the King's Indian Defence in this match?"

Kasparov: "I think all openings are 100% sound – all **normal** openings, that is! It is just a question of your mood and your preparation."

The question put by Kouatly sounds pretty naïve, of course, but the answer it received is actually very valuable. Contrary to what many players believe, there is no objective basis for thinking that the Sicilian is better than the French, or the Nimzo-Indian better than the Slav, etc. In reality, all 'normal' main-line openings are perfectly sound, and there is no good reason for preferring one opening over another. Opening theory is largely a matter of fashion, and lines go in and out of

popularity mainly for subjective reasons. What matters is how comfortable you feel with an opening, and how well you 'know' (in the broadest sense of know and understand) it.

It follows from this that one should be very careful about switching openings, just because a certain variation looks unpleasant or a certain GM has just lost a game with it. All openings are sound, and all openings have their critical variations. If you give up an opening every time you encounter a problem with it, you will never have a decent opening repertoire. If you are playing a reputable main-line opening, it is essential to understand that there cannot be anything much objectively wrong with it. Consequently, when you encounter a problem in a given variation, you need to study the line concerned and find an improvement. Switching instead to a new opening will simply bring new problems, as well as depriving you of the chance to utilize your experience and understanding of your previous opening. This is a subject to which we will return in more detail in Chapter 8.

2 Variety – the Spice of Life?

In approaching the question of openings, a player has essentially two main options – either to stick resolutely to a narrow selection of openings, or play a wide variety of systems. Both these approaches have their pros and cons.

Playing Against the Pieces

Over the years, the majority of master players have tended to have a relatively narrow opening repertoire. They choose a certain set of lines for White, and as Black they have one main defence against 1 e4, and one against 1 d4. With only a few, relatively rare, exceptions, they stick to these lines through thick and thin. This approach has the key advantage that the player has plenty of opportunity to build up his knowledge and understanding of the lines he plays. There is nothing like practical over-the-board experience to develop one's understanding of an opening, or a certain type of middlegame or endgame structure. As we saw in the previous chapter, having a deep understanding of the typical middlegame and endgame positions to which an opening leads is one of the most important aspects of successful opening play. By devoting all of one's efforts to a narrow range of openings,

one has the chance to gain the necessary experience.

We have already cited above the example of Wolfgang Uhlmann, who showed an almost religious devotion to the French Defence throughout his entire career. Another leading non-Soviet GM of the 1950s and 1960s was Svetozar Gligorić. Although not quite as monomaniacally focussed as Uhlmann, Gligorić too was a player who stuck to a narrow opening repertoire. Against 1 e4, he usually defended a Closed Lopez, although he occasionally switched to the Sicilian, particularly in his younger years. Against 1 d4, he remained faithful to the King's Indian for his entire career, moulding the opening into a formidable weapon that brought him numerous points. As White, he was similarly well-focused, opening 1 d4 in the great majority of his games, and having a series of favourite opening lines from which he rarely varied.

As an example of the way Gligorić's approach can bring great dividends, I should like to look briefly at his handling of one particular line, namely the Exchange Variation of the Grünfeld. Gligorić was a firm believer in this line as the best reply for White. In the Russian collection of his best games, *Igrayu protiv Figur*,

he wrote on this subject: "My fondness for the Exchange Variation has lasted for more than a quarter of a century. Maybe fondness is not even the right word – rather, it seems to me a matter of principle, that if Black offers his opponent the chance to seize the centre, White is almost obliged to take up the challenge, notwithstanding Black's rapid development and queenside counterplay."

The following game is a characteristic example of Gligorić's expertise with his favourite line.

Gligorić – Tukmakov

USSR – Yugoslavia, Odessa 1975

1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 e4 g6 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d5 4 exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 5 e4 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 6 bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}c4$

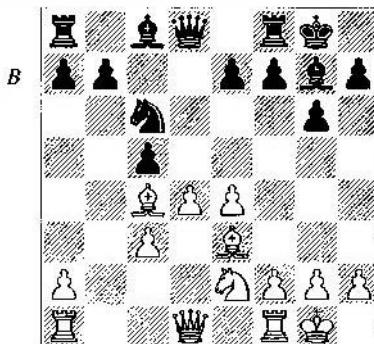
Although current theory concentrates on the lines with 7 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ as White's most dangerous try, the text-norm was considered virtually obligatory until the 1980s, and was the line always preferred by Gligorić.

7...e5

One of Gligorić's earliest experiences with the Exchange Variation saw a typically vigorous demolition of the line with ...b6: 7...0-0 8 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ b6 9 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 10 f3 c5 11 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ exd4 12 exd4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ e6?! 14 d5! exd5 15 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4+$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$?! 23 $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$?! $\mathbb{Q}e7$ +–) 23 $\mathbb{Q}g7\#$ (1-0) Gligorić-Palman, Buenos Aires 1955.

8 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 0-0 100-0 (D)

10... $\mathbb{Q}a5$



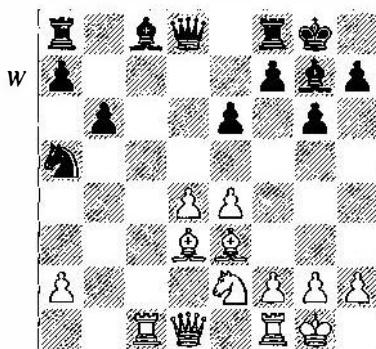
In his notes in the above-mentioned book, Gligorić points out an amusing paradox. In the 1973 Leningrad Interzonal tournament, he had lost two games on the white side of the Exchange Grünfeld, against Smejkal and Tukmakov. Subsequently, Smejkal had repeated the Grünfeld against him, this time trying out the line that Tukmakov had used at Leningrad. Armed with an improvement for White, Gligorić had won in the following crushing style: 10... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ b6 14 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}xh6$?! 16 $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ exd5? 18 $\mathbb{Q}d3$! $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xh7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ fxe6 22 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 24 gxf3 d3 25 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ 1-0 Gligorić-Smejkal, Milan 1975. Now, in the present game, it is Tukmakov's turn to repeat the Grünfeld, and he chooses the line with which Smejkal had beaten Gligorić at Leningrad 1973! This little tale illustrates something very typical of Gligorić's approach to openings – a refusal to be cowed into changing his line just because of a defeat.

11 ♜d3 cxd4 12 cxd4 b6 13 ♜c1

The first sign that Gligorić has an improvement ready. In the aforementioned game against Smejkal, where Black had preferred the immediate 11...b6, he had adopted the plan of ♜d2 and ♜h6. Here he has a very different idea in mind.

13...e6 (D)

13...♜b7 would be met by 14 d5.



14 e5!

This excellent move is the key to Gligorić's new plan. Although it looks odd to concede the d5-square and give up the chance of creating a passed pawn with d5, the move's merits outweigh these factors. Black's Grünfeld bishop on g7, usually the pride of his position, loses its effectiveness at a stroke. Meanwhile, the diagonal of White's d3-bishop is opened towards the black king, and White will follow up with ♜f4 and ♜g4, with the makings of a dangerous kingside attack. Meanwhile, the black knight on a5 is a long way from the key d5-square. In another game played at the same event,

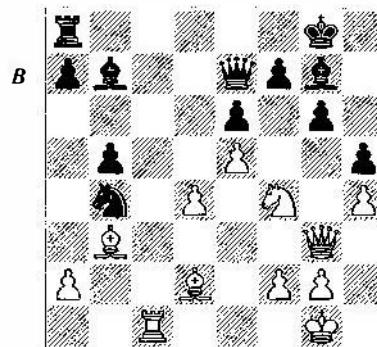
Gligorić used the same strategic idea to beat Vaganian in different variation of the Exchange Grünfeld: 7...0-0 8 ♜e2 ♜d7 9 ♜b6 10 ♜d3 ♜b7 11 e5! ♜c6 12 ♜f4 e6 13 ♜h3 ♜a5 14 ♜e2 c5 15 ♜e3 cxd4 16 cxd4 ♜fd8 17 ♜ad1 ♜e7 18 ♜g3 ♜ac8 19 h4! with initiative, Gligorić-Vaganian, USSR-Yugoslavia, Odessa 1975 (1-0, 56).

The present game continued:

14...♜b7 15 ♜f4! ♜e7 16 ♜g4 ♜c6 17 h4 ♜b4 18 ♜c4 b5 19 ♜b3 h5 20 ♜g3

20 ♜h3! is stronger, planning a later g4.

20...♜fc8 21 ♜d2! ♜xc1? 22 ♜xc1 (D)



At this point, Black blundered:

22...♜c8??

However, even after the superior 22...♜d5 23 ♜d3! White would have had the advantage.

23 ♜xc8+ ♜xc8 24 ♜c3 1-0

White is winning a piece. Gligorić had clearly won the theoretical debate, and avenged his previous defeat in the variation.

The lesson to be drawn from these games is that the player who sticks to one particular opening is able to develop a much deeper understanding of his systems than somebody who plays lots of different lines. However, in order to apply the Gligorić approach, you need to be the sort of player who has great self-confidence and belief in his own judgement. In effect you are saying “I believe this line is the absolute best way to play against this opening, and I don’t care who knows I play it, or what prepared lines they may have waiting for me, I am just going to play my line and let them do their worst.” Gligorić’s belief in the correctness of the Exchange Grünfeld is clear from the quote given above, and it runs through his entire approach to openings. Indeed, the title of best game collection quoted above, *Igrayu protiv Figur*, actually means “I play against the pieces”, or to put it more colloquially, “I play the board, not the man”.

In contemporary chess, there are fewer leading players who follow the Gligorić approach. Karpov is one who still does so, sticking very predictably to a narrow set of openings – 1 d4 with White, Caro-Kann and Nimzo/Queen’s Indian with Black. The main reason why he has few followers amongst today’s elite is that the increasing use of computer databases makes it so much easier to locate the weak spots in a player’s repertoire, and this has tended to encourage a policy of greater diversity. In addition, databases also make the task of mastering a new opening a lot quicker and easier than it was in the

past. In this respect, it is perhaps no coincidence that Karpov is notorious amongst elite GMs for being a distinct computer-phobe.

Nevertheless, there are a few very notable examples of players who have an almost mystic belief in the correctness of their pet lines, and hardly ever vary from them. The most obvious case which comes to mind is that of Russian GM Evgeny Sveshnikov. His repertoire is well-known – 4...e5 in the Sicilian, 2 c3 against the Sicilian, etc. He has written extensively on both of these lines, and even advances a theory which purports to prove on principle that 2 c3 is the best move against the Sicilian!

Another, less well-known GM who adopts the Gligorić-style approach is the young Russian, Alexei Alexandrov. My attention was first drawn to him in the mid-1990s, because one of the lines he plays was my choice against the Meran Variation.

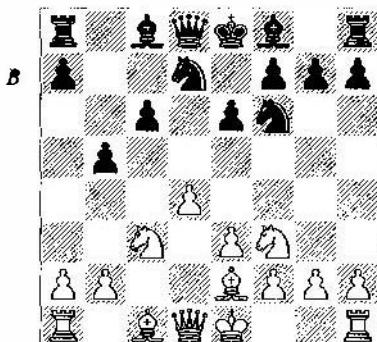
1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♜f3 ♜f6 4 ♜c3 e6 5 e3 ♜bd7 6 ♜d3 dxe7 7 ♜xe4 b5

The usual move is now 8 ♜d3. However, I became interested in:

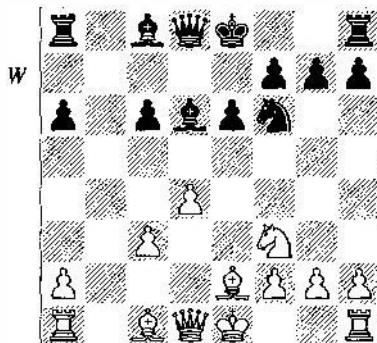
8 ♜e2 (D)

This was used successfully by Matthew Sadler in the early 1990s, and was also a favourite of my Russian trainer.

After a brief spell of popularity, 8 ♜e2 fell out of fashion following the game Seirawan-Kramnik, Manila OL 1992. After 8...a6 9 e4 b4 10 e5 bxc3 11 exf6, Kramnik avoided the crazy-looking 11...cxb2 12 fxg7 bxal 13 gxh8 ♜ which favours White because of his safer king position, and instead



preferred the simple 11...Qxf6 (although hailed as a novelty by many commentators, the move had in fact been played before, including one game as far back as 1949, but it was Kramnik's use of it which led to its popularity) 12 bxc3 d6 (D).



Now Seirawan tried 13 0-0 0-0 14 c4?! c5 and soon stood worse. Subsequent games concentrated on 13 Qd2 or 13 0-0-0 14 Qg5, but White failed to achieve anything.

As a result, most top GMs stopped playing 8 Qe2, but Alexandrov was

one of those who stuck to his favourite line. After a number of attempts to prove something for White after 13 Qa4, his perseverance finally paid off. Facing Bareev in the FIDE knockout in 2000 at New Delhi, Alexandrov reached the point of no return. After losing the first game of the mini-match, he was forced to win with White. Bareev is a Semi-Slav specialist, and so it was not hard to predict that the position after 12...d6 would arise on the board. At this point, however, Alexandrov produced the strong new move 13 c4!, which immediately puts Black in some trouble. The difference from Seirawan-Kramnik above is that now 13...c5 can be met by 14 dxc5 Qa5+ (or 14...Qxc5 15 Qxd8+ Qxd8 16 Qe5 with a clear advantage) 15 Qd2 Qxc5 16 0-0-0 17 Qe3 Qc7 18 c5! with advantage. The attempt to exploit White's uncasted king by 13...Qb4+ fails to 14 Qd2 Qxd2+ 15 Qxd2 Qe4 16 Qc3 Qa5+ 17 Qf1!, when White is again better. Bareev chose 13...0-0 but after 14 c5 Qc7 15 0-0 White was somewhat better, thanks to his space advantage and the bad bishop on c8. Tragically, Alexandrov later blew his advantage and lost, but he had proved his point theoretically, and at the time of writing, no top player has repeated the line beginning 8...a6 since.

Bareev himself wrote that the next time he needed a draw against 8 Qe2, he would choose 8...h4. However, even here Alexandrov has repeatedly shown that White can try to squeeze something out of the position, thanks to

Black's potentially weak b4-pawn. In the following game, I witnessed him do just this against WGM Nino Khurtsidze:

Alexandrov – Khurtsidze
Bad Wörishofen 2001

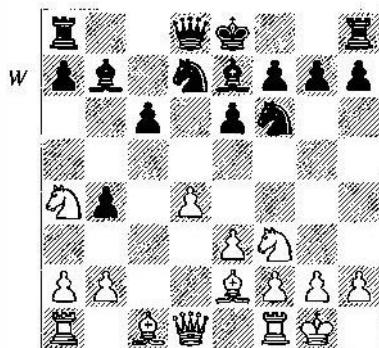
8...b4 9 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$

9... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 10 0-0-0 11 a3 (or 11 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 12 a3 bxa3?! 13 b3!?) 11...bxa3?! 12 b3! $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ and now two examples illustrate the point made in the next note:

a) 13... $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}fc8$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 17 bxc4 $\mathbb{Q}ab8$ 18 c5. Black has failed to achieve the ...c5 break and still has a weak pawn on c6, Aleksandrov-Svirin, Smolensk 1997.

b) 13...c5 14 dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 17 g3 $\mathbb{Q}df6$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 19 b4 and White was simply a strong pawn up in Aleksandrov-Illés-ecas, Batumi Echt 1999.

100-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ (D)

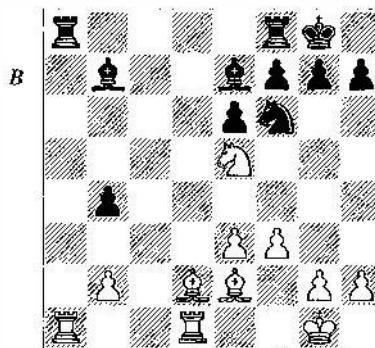


11 a3 a5

The natural 11...bxa3?! is an error because of 12 b3!, when Black has trouble achieving the ...c5 break without allowing White a favourable exchange of dark-squared bishops. This idea was demonstrated in the two Aleksandrov games in the previous note.

12 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 0-0 13 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ c5 14 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 15 dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 16 axb4 axb4 17 $\mathbb{Q}xa8$

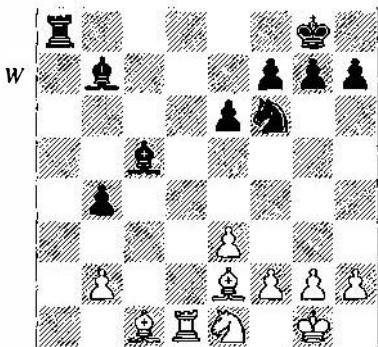
This is the first deviation from two earlier Aleksandrov games, in which he had preferred 17 $\mathbb{Q}d2$, and each time went on to win in very similar fashion to the present game: 17... $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 20 f3 (D).



20... $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ (20... $\mathbb{Q}fc8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}a2$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ h6 24 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 25 e4 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ bxc3 27 bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}b8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}a8$ f5 30 e5 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ g5 33 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ f4 35 $\mathbb{Q}d3+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 36 c4 1-0 Aleksandrov-Kuporosov, Moscow 1995) 21 $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ b3 23 $\mathbb{Q}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 27 e4 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 29

$\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $e5$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $f6$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 1-0 Alexandrov-S.Pedersen, Minsk 1994.

17... $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ (D)



At first sight, it is hard to believe that Black should have much trouble holding this, but in fact the b4-pawn drops off in surprisingly short order.

20 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $b3$ 22 $f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}c1$

The pawn is already indefensible, and Alexandrov went on to win, despite determined resistance.

The most striking thing about the above examples after 8...b4 is the close similarity between the way in which Alexandrov won all three games. His strategy was the same in each case, namely to exchange into an ending where Black's advanced b4-pawn was a weakness. Even though Black should be able to hold an ending of the type reached above, it is clearly not easy for him, and to defend such a position against a player who has extensive

experience in just such endings is even more difficult. None of Alexandrov's opponents in the above games can be classed as weak, yet none was able to hold the ending against him.

I am not for one moment suggesting that the 8 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ line is any kind of refutation of the Meran, nor even that it is a sure route to a white advantage. What I am saying, however, is that these games are another very good illustration of the plus side of sticking faithfully to one's chosen lines, and continually polishing and refining them in the light of one's experience. Rather than continually changing one's system, in pursuit of the very latest fashion amongst elite GMs, it can in practice be much more effective to devote one's time to enhancing one's knowledge of a particular variation, even if it does not lead to a 'theoretical' advantage. Whatever the objective merits of the line concerned, most opponents are going to find it difficult to defend against a player who has played the position numerous times before and built up a substantial level of experience with it.

Keeping on the Move

The foregoing examples have demonstrated the advantages of the narrow repertoire approach, but there are several drawbacks as well. Firstly, the danger of walking into opponents' preparation is much greater, and, as pointed out above, the widespread use of computer databases has increased this risk. However, although this is a

legitimate concern at master level, it seems to me that for the average club and league player, such a danger is relatively remote and should not be over-estimated. In local leagues or weekend tournaments, one rarely has much advance warning of who one is to play, and even if one did know, very few of one's opponents will have games on a database. As a result, there is much less chance of running into specific preparation at the average amateur level, whereas the advantages of playing an opening that one has played many times before and understands well are likely to be of rather greater significance.

The second drawback of the narrow repertoire is rather more subtle, and relates more to one's all-round development as a player. It is the danger that a player who sticks exclusively to certain opening lines will become too limited in his play. It is noteworthy that when outlining the main principles on which his chess school was based, Mark Dvoretsky mentioned "a rejection of the concentration of one's efforts on only one opening which is, unfortunately, typical of our days". It seems to me that this risk is particularly great for young players, whose style and all-round chess education is as yet relatively undeveloped. It is also a particularly serious problem when the opening concerned leads to positions of a very specific type. The French Winawer examined in the previous chapter is one example. The types of positions reached do not resemble those of any other opening,

which means that one can develop a very good understanding of that particular structure, without that knowledge being so useful in any other type of position. By contrast, if you specialize in an opening which typically produces an IQP structure, for example, the lessons you learn in that opening will be of relevance to a host of other openings, many of them quite different, but which happen also to lead to IQP structures.

Another example of an opening which produces rather unique middle-game and endgame positions is the Sicilian Dragon. This line has been very popular at junior levels in the UK for several decades, with Chris Ward an especially influential advocate. However, the types of middlegame which arise from this opening, particularly the Yugoslav Attack lines, do not resemble very closely those of any other opening. This has the great practical advantage that it is relatively easy to gain a good understanding of such a narrow set of typical positions, but it can also limit the development of a player's all-round positional ability. In this respect, I remember an interesting comment by Scottish no. 1, Jonathan Rowson, to the effect that he has a tendency to over-estimate the strength of exchange sacrifices, and that this is probably a consequence of playing too many Dragons in his youth.

There is no doubt at all that at grandmaster level the pendulum has swung markedly in recent years towards the policy of having a wide repertoire. If one goes back to the 1970s

and earlier, there were hardly any leading players who adopted a wide variety of different openings. Probably the first world-class player to do so was Jan Timman, who has always played a colossal range of openings, both as White and Black. Until the use of computer databases became commonplace over the past decade or so, he was about the only example, but now most of the top players have a fairly flexible repertoire. In Chapter 6, we will consider in more detail the impact of computers on opening preparation. For the present, I would just like to emphasize that the main reason for the move towards variety at the top GM level is the fear of opponents' preparation, which is made much easier by the use of databases. For the reasons discussed above, this consideration is much less important at club and weekend level.

By way of conclusion, I would say that each player must make up his or her own mind about which approach to prefer, but I would emphasize the following points:

1) I am firmly convinced that, at the club and weekend level, a player will usually get better results by sticking to a narrow range of openings. This is because the biggest weakness

of most players at that level is a lack of understanding of the typical middle-games and endgames reached from the opening. This knowledge is best improved by concentrating on a relatively small number of openings, and constantly working to improve one's knowledge and experience of them.

2) Having said that, such an approach does require a certain strength of character and belief in one's own judgement. If you are the sort of player who is easily swayed by other people's opinions, or by the outcome of a specific game, then you are likely to find it difficult to stick with one opening, although you should generally try to do so.

3) For juniors and others with a serious ambition to improve their play significantly, it is probably better to adopt a broader repertoire, in order to improve their all-round positional understanding. By concentrating on only one or two openings, they can often achieve better results and more rapid apparent improvement in the short term, but this often comes at the expense of an excessively narrow chess outlook. This in turn can become a barrier later on, when they find that the lack of an all-round chess culture operates to check further improvement.

3 Stylistics

Another factor which looms large in most people's perception of how one should choose openings is playing style. It is generally accepted that one should try to choose openings which fit in with one's style, and I would certainly not argue with this. However, it does seem to me that a certain amount of confusion and misconception surrounds this topic, and I therefore propose to go into it in some detail.

Who am I?

The first thing to say is that, in order to choose openings to fit your style, you need to know what your style is. This is not as easy to achieve as you might think. If you have never had your games studied by a trainer or strong player, you may well be harbouring some notable illusions or misconceptions about your chess style. It is extremely difficult to be objective about one's own play, and most players' perception of their own style is much closer to what they would like it to be, than to what it actually is.

My own case is typical. Before my Russian experience, I had always believed myself to be predominantly a positional player, whose strengths were my positional understanding and endgame technique, and whose main

weakness was tactical ability. One of the things which soon became apparent when my games were dissected by an experienced trainer was that this picture of my play was seriously wide of the mark. In fact, my best results in individual games were almost always the result of tactical opportunism, usually after having been outplayed positionally. Although I had won many 'smooth' positional games, these were generally in positions where I happened to have seen the appropriate plan in another game and was up against an opponent who was not strong enough to prevent me from repeating it. Whenever I faced an unfamiliar positional problem, against a strong player, I generally showed a complete lack of any idea how to play the position. And as for my endgame technique...

The reasons for this are not hard to see. I first became seriously interested in chess around 1973-4. This was the period when Anatoly Karpov was taking the chess world by storm. Naturally enough, Karpov became my first chess hero, and has remained a favourite to this day. Subconsciously, he was the player I wanted to be like, and I grew up believing that my playing style was similar to his. Another early hero was Ulf Andersson, whose legendary

ability to squeeze out wins from apparently equal-looking endings had a significant influence on my play as a junior. I went in for a lot of early queen exchanges in those days, and it is true that I did win a lot of endings. In fact, at the age of 15, I probably did have pretty good endgame technique – by the standards of 2000-rated, English 15-year-olds, that is. The problem is that while other aspects of my play improved subsequently, the endgame technique was neglected. By the time I was 30-something and an FM, the technical side of my game had fallen well behind certain other aspects.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that one should be very careful when considering one's own style. Firstly, you should try to analyse your games properly, especially the losses. These will frequently tell you far more about your strengths and weaknesses than your wins. Secondly, if at all possible, get an experienced trainer, or at least a strong player, to have a look at a representative selection of your games (not just the good ones!) and say what he thinks your strengths and weaknesses are. Indeed, if you are able to, get a second, third and fourth opinion. The more different, objective views you get, the more likely you are to arrive at a coherent and reasonably accurate conclusion.

No Style without Strength

Another point to bear in mind is that playing style is generally of more significance, the stronger a player is. At

the level of the typical club and weekend player, differences in style are not usually as great as most people imagine. Even at top grandmaster level, a surprisingly large proportion of games are decided by tactical oversights, deep in the middlegame and endgame. Inevitably, therefore, this will be true to an even greater extent, the weaker the players are. As a result, players at an average amateur level should not take too much notice of small differences in playing style. It is far more important to pick openings which you like and feel comfortable with, than to worry about whether a particular line really 'suits' your style.

The Opening – a Servant, not a Master

Once you have decided what sort of style you think you have, you can start to think about specific opening choices. Just as most writers on the game like to divide players into 'strategists' and 'tacticians', so they do the same with openings. Typically, you will see something such as the following:

Openings for positional players:

White: 1 d4, 1 c4, 1 $\mathbb{Q}f3$

Black against 1 e4: French, Caro-Kann, Petroff

Black against 1 d4: $\mathbb{Q}GD$, $\mathbb{Q}GA$, Nimzo-Indian, Queen's Indian

Openings for tactical players:

White: 1 e4

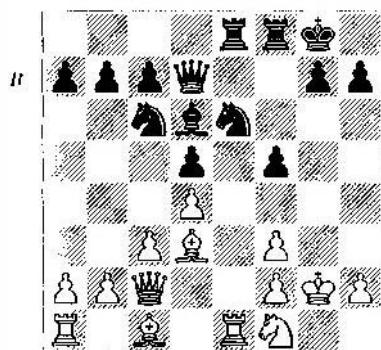
Black against 1 e4: Sicilian, Pirc-Modern, Alekhine

Black against 1 d4: King's Indian, Grünfeld, Benoni, Benko, etc.

In reality, just as it is misleading to describe Capablanca as a 'positional' player and Alekhine as a 'tactical' player, so the above classification of openings can be equally misleading. Consider the following couple of games.

Em. Lasker – Pillsbury
St Petersburg 1895/6

1 e4 e5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ d6 4 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 5 d4 d5 6 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 7 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 9 c3 f5 10 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 0-0 11 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}ae8$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ (D)

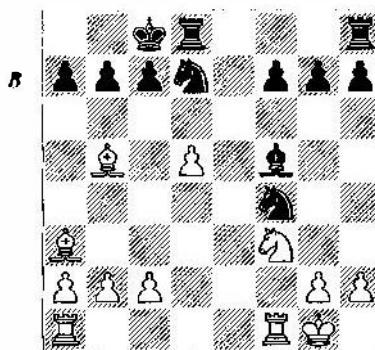


17... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$! 18 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1$! 20 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ f4 21 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$! 22 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 26 f3 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 27 b3 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}g2$ 30

h3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 32 c4 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ h5 0-1

Alexander – Bürger
Margate 1937

1 e4 e5 2 f4 d5 3 exd5 e4 4 d3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 0-0-0 14 0-0 (D)



14... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}hg8$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ h6 19 c4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ c6 21 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}ge8$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}d1+$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}d2+$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 1-0

In the first, Pillsbury chooses that well-known 'drawing weapon', the Petroff Defence, and proceeds to tear the then reigning world champion's head off. In the second example, that ferocious attacking weapon the King's Gambit results inside 15 moves in an endgame, with White having two bishops and a powerful initiative. The

point is that most openings are not as one-dimensional as people would have us believe. Around the turn of the century, the Petroff was widely employed by players such as Pillsbury and Marshall, both of whom are regarded as vigorous attacking players. Although nowadays the line is used at super-tournament level by players looking merely to make a draw as Black, there is no objective reason why it should not be played by more ambitious players, especially at less exalted levels. There is really only one variation which is of a drawish character, that being the line where White plays 5 $\mathbb{Q}e2$. Even here, the disappearance of the queens does not automatically mean that hands must be shaken, as is amply demonstrated by the fact that no less a player than Timman once lost the white side of this position in a serious tournament game:

Timman – Karpov

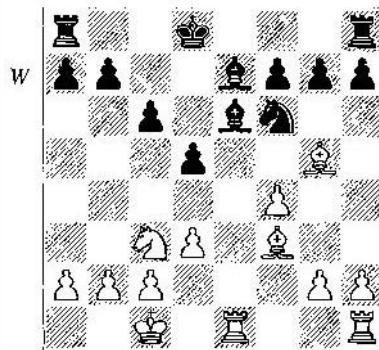
Tilburg 1980

1 e4 e5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ d6 4 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 5 $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 6 d3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{W}xe2+$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ c6 10 0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}del$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}xe6$

It is clear that Black has no problems, but that is no reason to agree a draw. Of course, the position should be drawn with correct play, but then again, the same could be said about the initial position of the game. In this case, neither player was inclined to offer a draw, and play continued.

14 f4 d5 15 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ (D)

Preparing to bring his king's rook into play. Of course not 15...0-0-0??, which would lose immediately to 16 f5.



16 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ g6 18 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 19 c4 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}c3$??

Thus far, White's manoeuvres have brought him no advantage, but from here on, he begins to get the worse of it. This move is the start of his troubles, because he allows his queen's bishop to be shut out of play. Correct was first to exchange on e7, and only then to bring the knight to c3.

21...f6 22 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xe8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$!

This nice move provokes a significant weakening of the white king position.

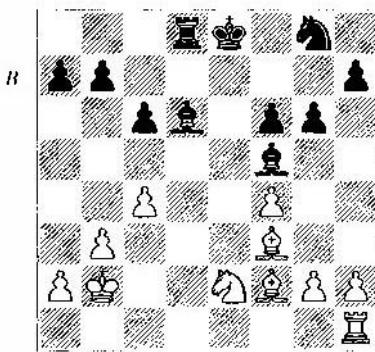
25 h3 $\mathbb{Q}f5$!

Now ... $\mathbb{Q}a3+$ is a threat, and the white king falls under the crossfire of the two black bishops.

26 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}f2$? (D)

A tactical error in what has now become a rather tricky position. Correct

was 27 ~~16~~, but Black is still rather better.



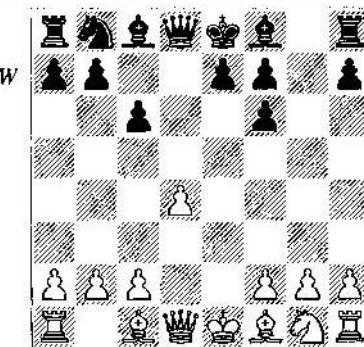
27... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$! 28 $g4$ $\mathbb{A}e5+$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}xa7?$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $fxe5$ 34 $h3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}h2$ 36 $g5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 0-1

He is losing another pawn, with no compensation. Although this game is hardly likely to make its way into any future edition of Timman's best games, the fact that a player who was by then truly among the world elite can lose this position so easily is a clear illustration that an equal position is by no means the same thing as a drawn one.

The key point about all this is that most major openings are sufficiently flexible to be played in different styles, depending on the taste and ability of the player concerned. The English Opening (1 c4), for example, is automatically classified in the 'positional' basket, yet it has been used regularly by many very vigorous attacking players, including Tal and Kasparov. If White wants a quieter positional game with less dependence on concrete variations,

he can follow up with such moves as $g3$, $\mathbb{g}2$, $\mathbb{a}c3$, $e3$, $\mathbb{d}ge2$, $0-0$, $b3$, $\mathbb{b}2$, etc. On the other hand, the player who is looking for more immediate hand-to-hand fighting can develop more aggressively with $\mathbb{d}c3$, $\mathbb{d}f3$, and an early $d4$ or $e4$, for example.

The same is true of almost any main-line opening. In the Caro-Kann, for example, after 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{d}x\mathbb{c}4$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$, the player who is looking for a more adventurous game than that offered by either 4... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ or 4... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ can play the line 4... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{g}xf6$ (D).



This variation had a spell of popularity in the 1970s and 1980s, but has never been fully trusted and then went almost totally out of fashion. However, in previous years it was employed very successfully by creative players such as Larsen and Bronstein. The Russian master and trainer Konstantinopolsky played the line for many years, in both over-the-board play and correspondence chess, with enormous success. Consider, for example, the

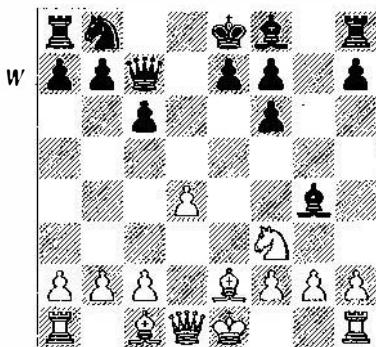
following crush against one of the best Soviet players of the first half of the 20th century:

Levenfish – Konstantinopolsky
Leningrad 1947

6 $\mathbb{Q}f3$

The position after 6 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ arose by transposition in Sokolovsky-Konstantinopolsky, USSR Ch (Moscow) 1950, but after 7... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ e6 9 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 12 f4 f5 13 c3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14 a4 0-0-0 15 a5 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 16 a6 b6 17 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}h5!$ 18 g3 c5! the white kingside was falling apart.

6... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ (D)

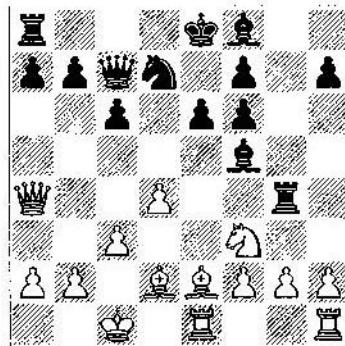


8 c3

Levenfish plans to castle queen-side, but his king proves surprisingly vulnerable on that side of the board. In Abroshin-Konstantinopolsky, USSR corr. Ch 1952-5, White preferred to castle kingside. After 8 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 9 c4 e6 10 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 11 h3 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 12 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 13 b4 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 0-0-0 15 a4 f5, a

sharp position typical of the variation had arisen, and Black eventually won after considerable complications.

8... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ e6 10 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 11 0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}f5!$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}de1$ $\mathbb{Q}g4!$ (D)



The start of a deeply-calculated and original plan of attack, involving placing the rook in a dangerous position in the centre.

13 h3 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 0-0-0 15 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ c5! 16 $\mathbb{Q}d2$

If instead 16 $\mathbb{Q}d3$, there follows 16... $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ c4. After the text-move, Black executes a long-planned exchange sacrifice to destroy the white king position.

16... $\mathbb{Q}xd4!$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}d2$

After 18 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ there is no defence to a lethal check on the h6-c1 diagonal.

18... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{Q}d3+$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3+$ 0-1

Konstantinopolsky himself demonstrated, in prototype form at least, the best response to Black's line, which is

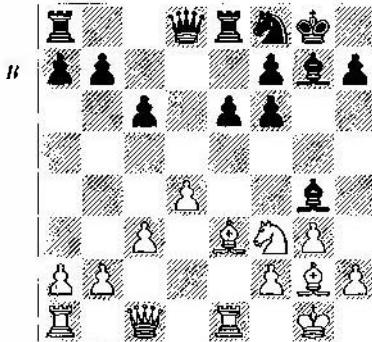
for White to fianchetto his king's bishop. This has the effect of blunting Black's counterplay along the g-file, while the bishop can exert useful pressure down the long diagonal (in conjunction with a pawn advance b4-b5, for example), in the event of Black castling queenside. It is this plan which is largely responsible for the decline in popularity of 5...gxf6.

Konstantinopolsky – Flohr
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1945

1 e4 c6 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d5 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{d}xe4$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$
5 $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{g}xf6$ 6 g3 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ e6
8 d4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 9 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}g7$

With White's pawn on g3, the bishop has little to do on the b8-h2 diagonal, so it makes some sense to place it instead on g7, where it also defends the slightly weakened black king position.

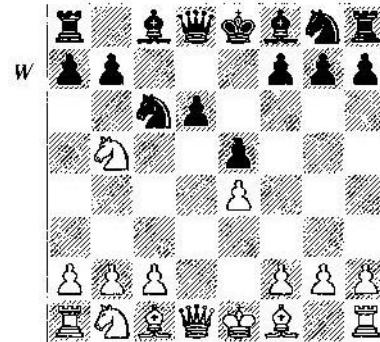
10 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ 0-0 11 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}c1$
13 c3 (D)



Now, instead of Flohr's positionally ugly 13...e5?, Konstantinopolsky recommended 13... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ f5, with

reasonable prospects for Black. White can claim a small advantage, with his bishop-pair and slightly sounder pawn formation, but probably no more so than in most openings.

Even an opening like the Sicilian offers great scope for a variety of approaches. If you want real blood and thunder, you can choose a line such as the Najdorf, but those who prefer a quieter life can do very well with some of the other Sicilian lines, such as the Accelerated Dragon, which tends to have fewer violent forcing lines, and in which positional understanding is more important. Another Sicilian variation where positional understanding is more important than knowledge of concrete tactical variations is the so-called Kalashnikov Variation, perhaps better described as the 'Son of Sveshnikov' variation: 1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ e5 5 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ d6 (D).



In this variation, the early fixing of the black centre pawns on e5 and d6 rules out any quick e5 breaks by

White, such as occur frequently in other Sicilian lines where Black plays ...e6 rather than ...e5. This in turn has the effect of slowing down the pace of the game, and rendering it more positional. If you look through a representative selection of games in this line, you will find few examples of a quick tactical blitz deciding the same in 25 moves or so. This is especially true in the main line, where White clamps down on the d5-square with 6 c4. The subsequent play revolves around each side's attempts to develop their pieces satisfactorily and (especially in Black's case) to effect strategically-desirable piece exchanges. Thus, a key idea for Black is to delay development of his king's knight, so as instead to play ...e7 and ...g5, exchanging off his bad bishop and removing the main defender of White's weakened dark squares. You can find some examples of how play develops after 6 c4 in the final chapter of the book, when we take a closer look at Sveshnikov's opening repertoire. It will be clear from those examples that this particular variation is much less tactical and violent than is generally the case with the Sicilian.

So, in conclusion, don't assume that a certain opening is only suitable for one particular style of play. If you like an opening, play it, and do not worry if a certain book dismisses it as only suitable for 'positional' players, or 'tactical' players, and you don't feel that you belong to the relevant category.

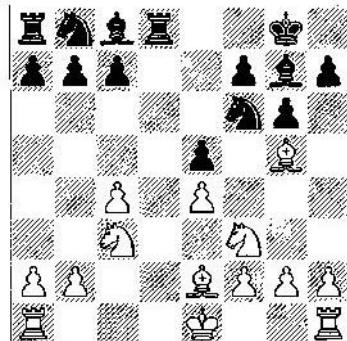
He's a Lumberjack and he's OK

I mentioned above that in my youth, I had a certain fondness for queenless middlegames. By playing for an early queen exchange, one is not generally seeking a significant opening advantage, but rather trying to obtain a position in which one hopes to feel more comfortable than one's opponent. If you are a player who enjoys endgames, there are a number of lines which result in an early queen exchange, and it makes sense to consider building your repertoire around them.

With the white pieces, most of the variations concerned arise from closed openings. We will look at a few examples in more detail below.

Against the King's Indian Defence, there are various ways for White to exchange pawns on e5, the main one being:

1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 g6 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 4 e4 d6 5 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 0-0 6 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ e5 7 dx $\mathbb{c}5$ dx $\mathbb{e}5$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ (D)



This line was played successfully in the 1970s by Ulf Andersson.

9... $\mathbb{A}e8$

This is the natural reply.

10 $\mathbb{Q}d5$

10 0-0-0 is also possible.

10... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 11 $\mathbb{C}xd5$ $c6$ 12 $\mathbb{A}c4$

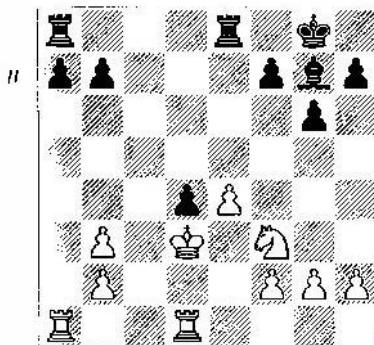
Andersson won several impressive games from this position, a characteristic example being:

Andersson – Byrne

São Paulo 1979

12... $\mathbb{C}xd5$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$

13... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ also led to an instructive advantage for White in Andersson-Byrnes, Hastings 1979/80 after 14 $\mathbb{A}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 15 $\mathbb{A}b3$ $\mathbb{A}e6$ 16 $\mathbb{A}hd1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 17 $\mathbb{A}xb3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 18 $\mathbb{A}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4+?!$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xd4!$ $\mathbb{C}xd4$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ (D).

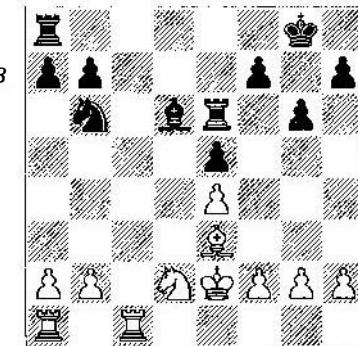


The passed pawn on d4 is more of a weakness than a strength, and all of the white pieces are better than their black counterparts. Andersson activated his kingside majority by f4 and e5, and went on to win.

14 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$?

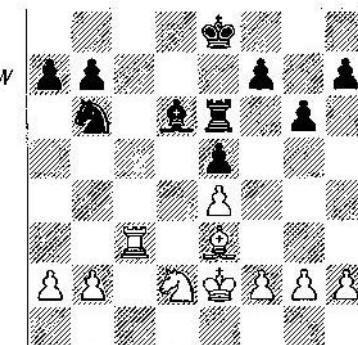
14... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ is the critical line.

15 $\mathbb{A}b3$ $\mathbb{A}e6$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{A}f8$ 17 $\mathbb{A}hc1$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 18 $\mathbb{A}xe6$ $\mathbb{A}xe6$ 19 $\mathbb{A}e3$ (D)



To the uninitiated, this position may look dead drawn, but in fact White has a number of small advantages: the more centralized king, control of the c-file, the slightly better bishop, the misplaced black rook on e6, etc. It may not look like a lot, but it proves too much for Robert Byrne.

19... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 20 $\mathbb{A}e3$ $\mathbb{A}c8$ 21 $\mathbb{A}ac1$ $\mathbb{A}xc3$ 22 $\mathbb{A}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ (D)



23 g4!

A gorgeous move, very typical of such positions. The threat is artificially to isolate the e5-pawn, by advancing g5. White would then also have the plan of h4-h5, opening the h-file for his rook to penetrate. Black can stop this by playing ...f6 himself, but the threat of undermining the e5-pawn hangs forever over his head.

23..f6 24 $\mathbb{B}b3$ $\mathbb{B}c7$ 25 a4 $\mathbb{B}c7$ 26
 a5 $\mathbb{B}c8$ 27 $\mathbb{B}c4$ $\mathbb{B}d8$ 28 $\mathbb{B}b5$ $\mathbb{B}c7$ 29
 b3 a6 30 $\mathbb{B}d5$ $\mathbb{B}d7$ 31 g5!

See the previous note.

31... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $g4$
 34 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 36 $\mathbb{Q}xg4$
 $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ 37 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 39
 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 40 $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$
 42 $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ 1-0

Black's best defence against this line may be 9...c6 (stopping White's ♜d5 move) 10 ♜xe5 ♜e8 11 0-0-0! ♜a6!, when theory considers Black's position equal. Even here White can keep trying with 12 ♜d6, although he should not achieve anything against accurate defence.

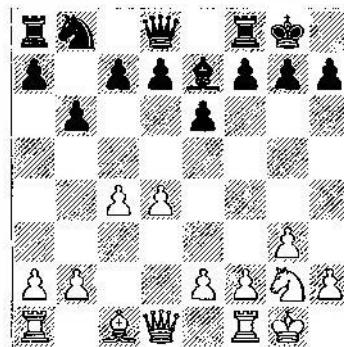
There are other ways to reach a similar endgame against the King's Indian. One such is 6 $\mathbb{A}e3$, instead of 6 $\mathbb{A}e2$. This line was played successfully for a number of years by Larsen. Against the most natural response, 6... $e5$, White's idea is to simplify with 7 $dxe5$ $dxe5$ 8 $\mathbb{W}xd8$ $\mathbb{B}xd8$ and now 9 $\mathbb{Q}d5$. Once again, this does not objectively promise White anything significant against best defence, but it leads to the kind of technical position we are looking for, and in which many King's Indian players do not feel comfortable. Players interested

in this line should check out the game Larsen-Hübner, Leningrad 1973, in which White won in instructive fashion.

Another opening which offers White the chance to head for a quiet technical position is the main-line Queen's Indian, beginning:

Now, instead of the most common move 8 $\mathbb{W}c2$, White can force some simplification by:

8 ♜xe4 ♜xc4 9 ♜e1 ♜xg2 10 ♜xg2 (D)



Once again, this position is less easy for Black than it appears.

10..d5

Else White can take full control of the centre with 11 e4.

11 a4

The slight vulnerability of Black's queenside light squares now means that he is probably best advised to exchange queens.

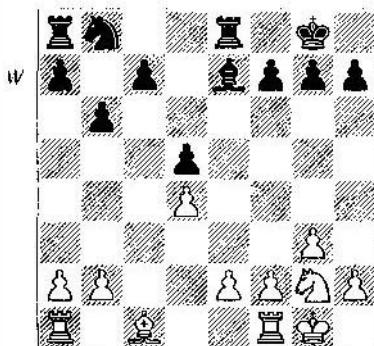
11... ♕e8

Or 11... $\mathbb{W}d7$, which is similar.

12 $\mathbb{W}xe8$ $\mathbb{B}xe8$

Now there is a further pawn exchange:

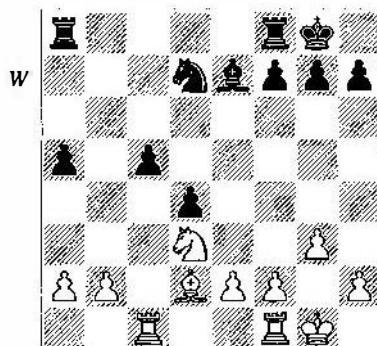
13 cxd5 exd5 (D)



Although the position may look fairly harmless for Black, practice suggests that White has very good chances of an initiative. The queenside pawn-structure is such that Black will almost certainly have to play ...c5, since otherwise his c-pawn will remain backward. Once he plays ...c5, an exchange of pawns will leave Black with hanging pawns on d5 and c5, and in this rather simplified position, hanging pawns are certainly something of a liability. White's subsequent plan will be to pressurize the pawns, and try to force one of them to advance, whereupon the pawn duo can be broken up by a timely b3 (if Black has played ...c4) or e3 (if Black has played ...d4). White's practical results from this position have been very good, with the results suggesting that even if White does not win, he can make Black's life

fairly unpleasant for a long time to come, with very few chances of losing.

One characteristic high-level example was Petrosian-Botvinnik, Moscow Wch (3) 1963, in which the queen exchange occurred on d7 rather than e8: 11...c5 12 $\mathbb{A}e3$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 13 $\mathbb{W}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 14 cxd5 exd5 15 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 16 dxc5 bxc5 17 $\mathbb{Q}ac1$ d4 18 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ a5 19 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ (D).



White has achieved his optimal piece set-up, and now the thematic 20 $e3!$ $\mathbb{d}x e3$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ consolidated his advantage. After a gruelling 86-move defence, Botvinnik finally managed to salvage half a point, but it is hard to see the black side of this variation appealing to anyone but masochists.

Both of the above variations can be reached via 1 d4, but the next line, the Anti-Grünfeld, is only available to those who open 1 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ or 1 c4.

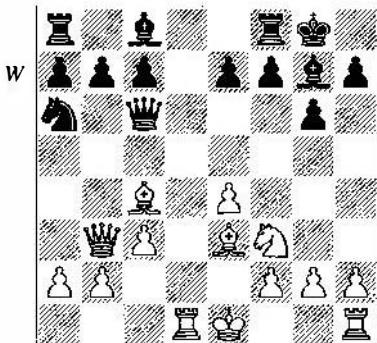
1 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 g6 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d5 4 cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$

In this position, White has a choice of attractive ways to avoid the Grünfeld

proper. Those looking for a sharper middlegame should investigate 5 $\mathbb{W}b3$ or 5 $\mathbb{W}a4+$ (or even 4 $\mathbb{W}a4+$ on the previous move), but those with a fondness for wood-chopping have the alternative...

5 e4 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 6 dxc3 $\mathbb{W}xd1+$

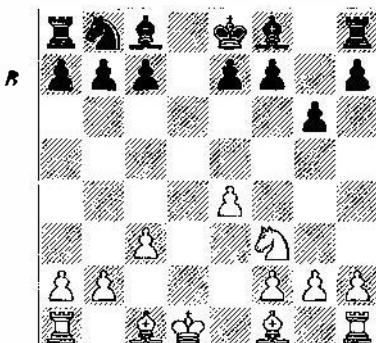
Black has no good way to avoid the queen exchange. After 6... $\mathbb{Q}d7$, 7 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ forces the ungainly 7...e6, since the natural 7... $\mathbb{Q}g7?$ loses immediately to 8 $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$, while in Andersson-Kouatty, Malta 1980 Black tried the artificial 6... $\mathbb{Q}d6?$ but lost quickly after 7 $\mathbb{W}b3!$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 0-0 9 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}a6?$ (D).



Now 11 $\mathbb{Q}xf7+!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}d8+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{W}xf7$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xa8!$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 17 axb3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}xf8+$ $\mathbb{W}xf8$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ gave White a decisive advantage.

7 $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ (D)

Once again, White has hopes of a small advantage in this quiet position. His king has a nice centralized post on c2, and he can post his bishops more



actively than their black counterparts with $\mathbb{Q}c4$ and $\mathbb{Q}f4$ or $\mathbb{Q}e3$. Black, on the other hand, has to find a way to activate his own bishops and connect his rooks in time to contest the d-file. Above all, the psychological battle is likely to favour White, since he has managed to force his opponent into the kind of quiet endgame position which White is looking for, and which will not usually appeal to most Grindfeld players.

Once again, Ulf Andersson is one of the high priests of this line, the following being a model of White's play:

Andersson - Franco

Buenos Aires 1979

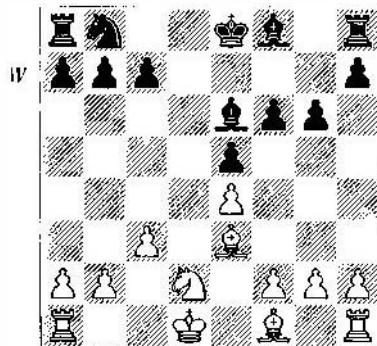
7...f6!

Generally regarded as best. Instead, 7...c5?! 8 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b6 9 a4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}b5!$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}hd1$ a6 13 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 14 h3 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 15 gxf3 0-0 16 f4! $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 17 e5 left White clearly better in Andersson-Tempone, Buenos Aires 1979, while 7... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}el$ c6 10 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 0-0 11 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ h6 12 a4

13 e5 e6 14 $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ b6
 16 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ g5 18 g4 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 19
 b4 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 21 hxg5
 hxg5 22 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 24
 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}aa8$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ +–
 was Romanishin-Grigorian, USSR Ch
 (Moscow) 1976.

8 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ e5 9 $\mathbb{Q}d2!$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ (D)

A key theme of the position is that White seeks to prevent Black from exchanging dark-squared bishops by $\mathbb{Q}c5$, which would rid Black of his inactive bishop. Thus, 9... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ would be met by 10 $\mathbb{Q}b3!$ stopping ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$.



10 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 12 b4!

Again stopping ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$.

12... $\mathbb{Q}b6$??

Slightly better is 12...0-0-0, with only a small edge for White.

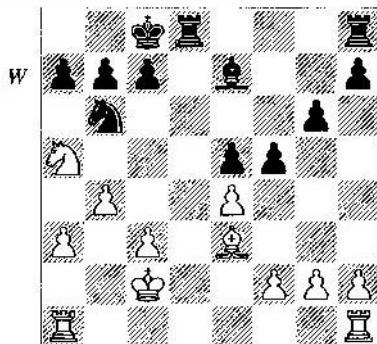
13 $\mathbb{Q}a5!$

‘Tying Black to the defence of the b7 pawn.

13...0-0-0+ 14 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$

14...h5!, planning ... $\mathbb{Q}h6$, would be more consistent with Black’s positional aims.

15 a3 f5? (D)



This move weakens the e5-pawn, which Andersson exploits immediately.

16 $\mathbb{Q}xb6!$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}c4$

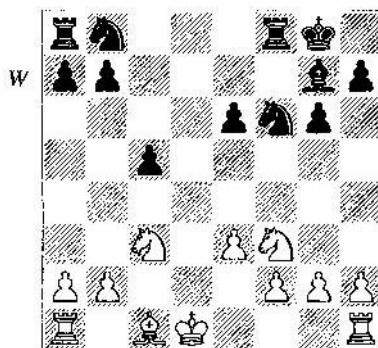
Now White has a clear advantage, with the superior minor piece, a target on e5, and the chance of breaking in down the a-file. As always, the little man converts his superiority in impeccable style.

17... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18 a4 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}he1$ $\mathbb{Q}be8$
 20 b5! f4 21 a5 bxa5 22 $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ b6 23
 $\mathbb{Q}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}ea1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ $\mathbb{Q}de8$
 26 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}a8+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}a2$
 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}d2+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}a7$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 31
 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 32 h3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 34
 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 35 c4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 36 c5 bxc5 37
 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 38 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 39 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$
 40 f3 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 41 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 42 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 1-0

Thus, we can see from the above that players who are happy as White to play for a small edge in a queenless middlegame have a number of lines where they can achieve the sort of position they want. Even in other variations, the willingness to settle for a near-equal endgame, rather than trying to

obtain an objective opening advantage, makes one's whole job of opening repertoire management very much easier. It reminds me of something Petrosian wrote about his work with Isaak Boleslavsky, who became Petrosian's second during the 1960s. Boleslavsky was a leading theoretician, whereas Petrosian's approach to openings had always been much more laid-back. With his superb intuition and depth of positional understanding, he was accustomed to treating the opening relatively flippantly, and did not normally strive very hard to gain a theoretical advantage. He wrote that, when analysing with Boleslavsky, whenever he suggested a relatively tame or second-rate move, Boleslavsky would not even try to refute it, but would simply say "To play like that, there is no need to prepare".

Although Boleslavsky's words were clearly meant critically, it seems to me that for many players below master level, having a repertoire where there is minimal need to prepare could in fact be quite attractive. It must be remembered that, despite its shortcomings, Petrosian's approach proved good enough to wrest the world title out of the hands of Botvinnik, one of the best-prepared players ever. We saw above the quiet approach Petrosian used against the Queen's Indian in the third game of their match. Two games later, his play was just as tame-looking against the Grünfeld: 1 d4 $\mathbb{N}f6$ 2 c4 g6 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d5 4 $\mathbb{N}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 5 e3 0-0 6 $\mathbb{N}e2$ dxc4 7 $\mathbb{N}xc4$ c5 8 d5 e6 9 dxe6 $\mathbb{W}xd1+$ 10 $\mathbb{N}xd1$ $\mathbb{N}xe6$ 11 $\mathbb{N}xe6$ fxe6 (D).



No doubt, during their preparations for the match, Boleslavsky dismissed this position as not being worthy of preparation, but this did not prevent Petrosian from going on to win a textbook ending.

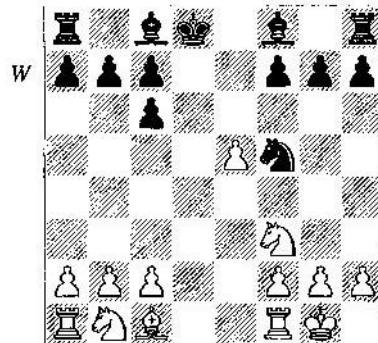
A similar example to the above occurred in the game Andersson-Xie Jun, Belgrade 2000, which opened thus: 1 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 g6 3 g3 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ 0-0 5 0-0 $\mathbb{N}d5$ 6 cxd5 $\mathbb{N}xd5$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 8 d4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 9 e3 $\mathbb{Q}e8$. Proving an advantage for White in this line has taxed the ingenuity of many top GMs. Even Karpov, who has played the white side against Kasparov, was unable to show anything for White. Because of this, attention has recently switched to lines where White avoids the capture on d5, and instead allows Black to play ...dxc4 himself. However, if you are a player like Ulf Andersson, you do not need to spend weeks poring over the subtleties of such matters, and trying to find a way of squeezing out an edge for White. Instead, you just take a dead-equal ending with 10 b3 e5 11 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$.

1 \mathbb{Q} xe5 \mathbb{W} xd1 13 \mathbb{B} xd1 \mathbb{Q} .xe5 14 \mathbb{Q} .b2
(6. turn down all your opponent's draw offers, and eventually grind him to, in this case, her) down in 83 moves!

Of course, Andersson is an extreme case of a player who revels in queenless middlegames, and plays them magnificently. I remember once hearing about his attitude to skittles games, when he played at the Hastings tournament several times in the late 1970s. As usual in such tournaments, the players could often be found playing blitz in the bar in the evenings. In Andersson's case, however, he would frequently remove the queens from the board, and sometimes the rooks as well, before starting play! Needless to say, he was unbeatable in such games.

Thus far, we have looked at the endgame-oriented approach from White's side. Naturally, it is much easier to bring about such queenless middle-game positions with the white pieces, partly because White has the first move and can dictate the pace of the game more readily than Black. In addition, players who are Black are generally less averse to a draw, and thus more likely to allow an early queen exchange, in the often mistaken belief that it promises easy equality. Nevertheless, players who are happy with a queenless middlegame have one very obvious choice against 1 e4, and given its present popularity, I cannot pass it by without some brief comments. I refer, of course, to the infamous Berlin Defence, which Kramnik used so successfully to blunt Kasparov's 1 e4 in

their world championship match in London 2000: 1 e4 e5 2 \mathbb{Q} f3 \mathbb{Q} c6 3 \mathbb{Q} h5 \mathbb{Q} f6 4 0-0 \mathbb{Q} xe4 5 d4 \mathbb{Q} d6 6 \mathbb{Q} xc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 \mathbb{Q} f5 8 \mathbb{W} xd8+ \mathbb{Q} xd8 (D).



I believe that this line is quite a good practical choice for a player who has little inclination to devote a lot of time to the study of opening theory, and who enjoys playing endgames and technical positions. Despite the fact that it has become very popular at top GM level, it is a line which can be played at less exalted levels with relatively little preparation, because the lines involved are almost all non-forcing, and rely much more on understanding than on knowledge of specific tactical sequences. In addition, Black has many different ways to play, which makes specific preparation by White rather difficult. After the main move 9 \mathbb{Q} c3, for example, Black has at least five playable replies: 9... \mathbb{Q} e8, 9...h6, 9... \mathbb{Q} d7, 9... \mathbb{Q} e7 and 9...a5, all of which are similar, yet also subtly different.

Without in any way attempting to write a textbook on the line, it is worth outlining its main positional considerations. As in the Exchange Lopez, Black has doubled queenside pawns, but has the two bishops. An added factor here is that he has lost the right to castle. Although the absence of queens means that he is unlikely to fall victim to a direct attack on his king, the main drawback of this is that he is likely to have some difficulties bringing both his rooks into play.

So, one may ask, why hasn't White simply got a superior version of the Exchange Lopez? After all, he has the same pawn-structure as in that line, plus he has exchanged queens (usually to White's benefit) and he has misplaced the black king. The answer is that, unlike the Exchange Lopez, here White's e-pawn has been lured forward to e5. This apparently insignificant factor makes all the difference, because it means that Black's minor pieces have the use of the excellent squares d5 and f5, and in addition, the e5-pawn obstructs White's remaining bishop. Indeed, one of Black's principal strategic aims in this line is to exchange his f3-bishop for White's c3-knight, thus producing an opposite-coloured bishop position. By threatening ...a4 or ...c4, White can usually be induced to place his queenside pawns on the light squares, where they are vulnerable to Black's bishop, coming round the back via the f5-square. By contrast, White's bishop is usually unable to get round the back of Black's queenside pawns, because the white

central pawn-structure on e5 and f4 obstructs his bishop's path.

Another major theme of the line is the attempt by White to mobilize his kingside pawn-majority by f4 and f5. Black in turn must fight against this, trying to engineer a blockade by moves such as ...h5. Often, White will advance g4 to expel a black knight from f5, but in this case, he must be on the alert for the subsequent counterblow ...h5, which may undermine his kingside pawn phalanx.

There are numerous GM games being played with this line at present, so there is no shortage of study material for players who are interested in it. As well as Kramnik and the late Tony Miles, another player who specializes in the line is Alexandrov, some of whose games on the white side of the Semi-Slav we studied earlier. If you are interested in the Berlin Defence, a study of the games by those players will teach you a great deal. Naturally, White is not obliged to answer 1 ...e5 with the Lopez, and indeed, at club and league level, the non-Lopez open games are quite popular. Nevertheless, with the possible exception of the Scotch Game, none of these poses too formidable a threat to a reasonably well-prepared player, so if you are comfortable with the Berlin, you will be well on the way to a very solid and dependable repertoire against 1 e4.

What I have sought to achieve in the foregoing is to give an example of how one's opening repertoire can be built around one's stylistic preference. Thus, a player whose style tends towards

endgames and technical play can build an opening repertoire around this, by choosing various lines which produce queenless middlegames of the type such a player should enjoy. Because these lines, by their very nature, are non-forcing, their theory is unlikely to change radically over time, with the

result that relatively little time is required to keep one's theoretical knowledge up to date. Naturally, one cannot always achieve the type of position one wants, even with White, but having a repertoire based around the lines considered above will enable one to do so in a good proportion of one's games.

4 Main Roads or Side-Streets?

Another important decision to make when forming one's opening repertoire is whether to concentrate on popular main-line openings, or to attempt to avoid theory by employing little-known sidelines. There are advantages in each approach, although I have clear views on which is better for certain types of players.

Following the Backstreets

For many club players, there is a temptation to avoid main-line opening theory and instead play offbeat openings. This has the great merit of avoiding one's opponent's theoretical knowledge and thus throwing him much more on his own resources.

In addition, many of the lines one sees played at club level are gambits, which lead to the kind of exciting open play that many players find attractive.

There is no doubt that such an approach can prove effective, even up to master level. Indeed, the anti-theoretical approach has been very popular in England over the past 20-30 years, with a number of the leading English players building their opening repertoires around offbeat lines. One of the first to do so was the late Tony Miles, who, after using the Sicilian Dragon extensively in his early career, gave up

the line in favour of less well-worn theoretical byways. Tony had great success with this approach, culminating in his famous win over Karpov at Skara 1980, when he played 1 e4 a6 2 d4 b5 as Black. One of Tony's earlier favourites was 1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 (or 1 c4 b6). This was also taken up by other English players, and became known as the English Defence. The following game is a good example of the effectiveness of this defence in Tony's hands against unsuspecting opponents.

Farago – Miles
Hastings 1976/7

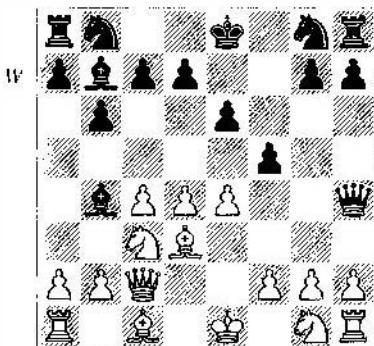
1 d4 b6 2 c4 ♜b7 3 ♜c3 e6 4 c4 ♜b4
5 ♜c2 ♜h4!

At the time, such moves created something of a sensation, but they soon became a thematic idea in this opening.

6 ♜d3 f5 (D)
7 g3?

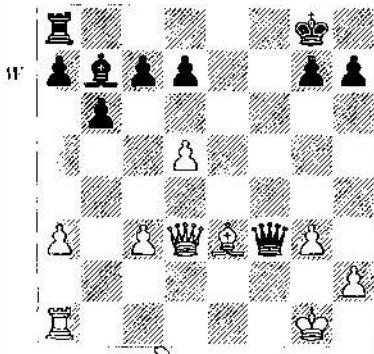
Already a serious error. White has to try the more adventurous 7 ♜f3 ♜xc3+ 8 ♜xc3 ♜g4 9 0-0 fxe4 10 ♜e5, although it is perhaps understandable that Farago was unhappy about being forced to fish in such murky waters so early in the game.

7... ♜h5 8 ♜e2 ♜f7 9 f3 fxe4 10
fxe4 ♜f6 11 d5



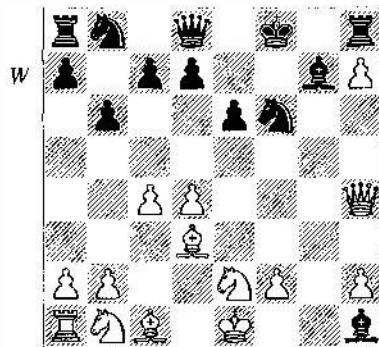
Already White is having tremendous difficulty holding his centre together, and Miles's subtle play soon brings it crashing down.

11...0-0 12 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}g6!$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{W}h5!$ 14 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 15 a3 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 16 bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 18 $\mathbb{W}xd3$ exd5 19 exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 20 cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 21 $\mathbb{R}xf3$ $\mathbb{W}xf3$ (D)



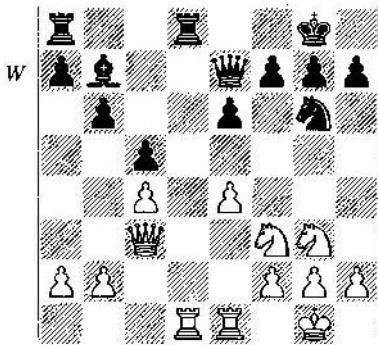
White's once-proud pawn-centre has been reduced to rubble, and he is a pawn down with an exposed king. He only managed to struggle on for a few more moves.

Miles won many such games in the 1970s, before opponents had worked out how to play against the English Defence. Gradually, however, White developed more subtle, less cooperative ways to develop, and the line began to claim fewer drastic victims such as Farago above. Nonetheless, it remains playable to this day, with Jon Speelman being one who still uses it quite regularly. If you are interested in it, the most critical line is probably 1 d4 e6 2 c4 b6 3 e4 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}d3$. Now the sharpest and most thematic reaction for Black is 4...f5, which leads to fantastic complications after the critical response 5 exf5 $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 6 $\mathbb{W}h5+$ g6 7 fxg6 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 8 gxh7+ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}e2!$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 10 $\mathbb{W}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ (D).



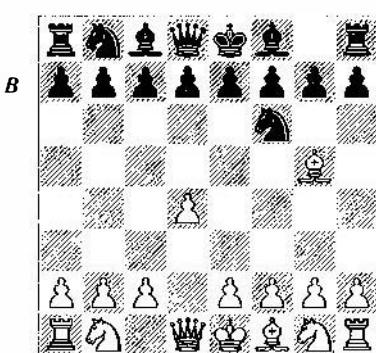
This was first played in Browne-Miles, Tilburg 1978. White has sacrificed a whole rook, but will follow up with $\mathbb{Q}g5$, $\mathbb{Q}f4$, etc., with a ferocious attack. Many attempts have been made to justify Black's position, but it is hard to recommend 4...f5 to any but the very bravest players. Instead, Black

should probably prefer 4... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ (or 5 $\mathbb{Q}f3$) 5... $\mathbb{Q}b4$, when Black simply takes the bishop-pair and settles for a cramped but solid position after a subsequent ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, ...0-0, ...d6, etc. A recent example was Lamprecht-Speelman, Bundesliga 2001/2, which continued 5 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 6 d5!?, $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ + 7 $\mathbb{W}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4+$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2+$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}bxg2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 10 0-0-0 11 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 12 $\mathbb{W}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ c6 14 dxc6 dxc6 15 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ c5 (D) with an equal position.



Another English player who has made a very successful career out of offbeat openings is Julian Hodgson. His greatest weapon over the years has been the Trompowsky, 1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ (D).

Almost single-handedly, Julian has turned this opening into a much-feared weapon in British chess, so much so that it has become a main-line opening. There are many obvious merits – White avoids his opponent's normal queen's pawn defence, he also himself



dictates the choice of opening, and there is also a good deal of flexibility in the way one can play the white position. Against 2... $\mathbb{Q}e4$, for example, White can choose between 3 $\mathbb{Q}f4$, 3 $\mathbb{Q}h4$, and even the outlandish 3 h4, with which Hodgson scored many victories. Against quieter replies, such as 2...d5, White also has a choice of strategies. The original idea was to capture on f6 if allowed, doubling the black pawns. In more recent years, however, Hodgson and other 'Trompers' have tended to prefer simple development by 3 e3. Note that White keeps open the option of playing c4 at some point, which means that Black must be careful not to allow a transposition into an unfavourable Queen's Gambit variation.

Another potential advantage of the Trompowsky is that it can be played against 1...d5 as well, although it is generally accepted that the line has less bite in that case. A typical line is 1 d4 d5 2 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ h6 3 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ c6 4 e3 $\mathbb{W}b6$ 5 $\mathbb{W}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$, when he will follow up with ...e6, ... $\mathbb{Q}d7$, ... $\mathbb{Q}gf6$, etc. Black has

fairly comfortable play here, although chances are no more than equal.

At club level, one also sees many examples of gambit play. Openings such as the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit, Albin Counter-Gambit, Latvian Gambit, etc., are all played regularly at club and league level, whereas they hardly ever get an outing in master tournaments. There is a very simple reason for this, of course – although interesting and difficult to meet over the board, such openings are not really sound, and very few grandmasters are willing to risk them. Nonetheless, there is much to be said for playing such systems at lower levels of play, particularly if you enjoy playing sharp attacking lines. Many players find it uncomfortable to defend against an opponent who is prepared to sacrifice material in return for speculative attacking chances. In such positions, the cost of a single error is much higher than in quieter openings. If you make an error in a typical Réti Opening middlegame, you may end up getting a small positional disadvantage, but if you make a similar mistake in the sort of wild tactical positions which often arise from gambits, you are quite likely to find yourself being mated, or losing a substantial amount of material.

One of the things to bear in mind when playing gambits is that it is not always necessary to burn one's boats in search of an instant knockout. Quite often, it is possible to play in a more restrained fashion, aiming for longer-term compensation from piece activity. One example is the so-called Von

Hennig-Schara Gambit, which arises as follows:

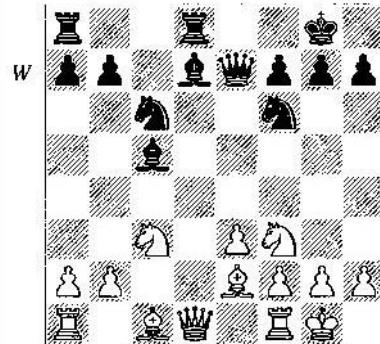
1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ c5 4 exd5 exd4

This last move distinguishes the Von Hennig-Schara from the normal Tarrasch Defence (4...exd5). The main line now runs:

5 $\mathbb{W}a4+$ $\mathbb{A}d7$ 6 $\mathbb{W}xd4$ exd5 7 $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 9 $\mathbb{W}d1$ $\mathbb{A}c5$ 10 e3 $\mathbb{W}e7$ 11 $\mathbb{A}e2$

At this point, the normal move for Black is 11...0-0-0, followed by ...g5-g4. However, the open c-file means that Black's king does not feel terribly safe on the queenside, and White is able to open up further lines by returning his extra pawn with the move b4, opening the b-file. Instead of all this, Black has a less explored and somewhat less risky way to play:

11...0-0 12 0-0 $\mathbb{B}fd8$ (D)



The white queen is slightly embarrassed for a comfortable post, and his queenside development is also lagging. Black has plans such as ... $\mathbb{B}ac8$, followed perhaps by ... $\mathbb{Q}e5$, looking to

exchange off the knight which defends White's king. If White exchanges on e5, the recapture ... $\mathbb{W}xe5$ will probably provoke a weakening of the white king position by g3, after which Black can aim for moves such as ... $\mathbb{A}g4$ and ... $\mathbb{W}h5$, etc. Another idea for Black, instead of ... $\mathbb{Q}e5$, is ...a6, followed by ... $\mathbb{A}a7-b8$, trying to create threats along the b8-h2 diagonal. While Black does not have full compensation for the pawn, he certainly has some initiative, and the white position is probably less easy to play over the board, especially at a fast time-limit. It is interesting to note that *Fritz*, usually an extremely materialistic judge of positions, only assesses White's advantage here as less than half a pawn.

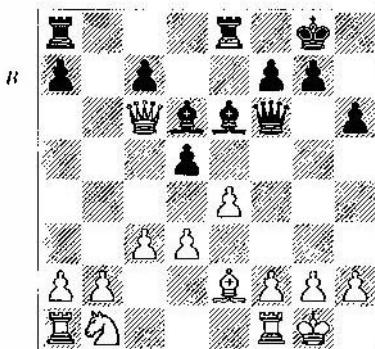
I have already alluded to the fact that the biggest problem with such off-beat lines, especially the gambits, is that objectively they are not fully sound. This is something which one must simply recognize and accept. If it were possible to get a lively attacking position without any risk, everybody would do it. Instead, one has to understand that in order to obtain sharp attacking chances, especially as Black, one has to take risks; if you don't like doing this, you should be playing something much more solid.

Another problem which one encounters in playing offbeat openings is that there is frequently a dearth of reliable books about such systems. Because such lines rarely get tested at master level, an awful lot of the analysis which finds itself into opening books is of very poor quality, often

based on a mixture of 19th century mismatches and 20th century Internet blitz games. Few strong grandmasters are going to write a book about a discredited and probably unsound gambit, so books on such lines are usually written by weaker players, who are often themselves enthusiastic practitioners of the opening and lack the necessary objectivity. In his book *Secrets of Practical Chess*, John Nunn gave two splendid examples of the dangers of such books, even when written by grandmasters. I recall one small instance from my youth, concerning the Ponziani Opening.

After the characteristic moves 1 e4 e5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 c3 Black has a number of satisfactory defences, but one of his sharpest and most ambitious tries is the Leonhardt Gambit, 3...d5 4 $\mathbb{W}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$. With this move, Black sacrifices the e5-pawn for rapid development. During the mid-1970s, a book was published advocating the Ponziani Opening for White, and I and a club friend decided to take a closer look at it. My friend had played the opening in the past, but had been put off by the Leonhardt Gambit. Naturally, therefore, we were keen to see what the author recommended for White. He gave the line 5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{A}d6$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $bxc6$ 7 c3 0-0 8 $\mathbb{A}e2$ $\mathbb{A}e8$ 9 $\mathbb{A}g5$ h6 10 $\mathbb{A}xh6$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 11 $\mathbb{W}xc6$ $\mathbb{A}e6$. This had all been played in a top-level correspondence game, which had continued 12 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ $\mathbb{W}g5$, when Black had compensation for his material. However, the author instead recommended for White the 'obvious' move 12 0-0 (D), claiming

that with the white king now out of the centre, it was clear that Black had insufficient compensation for his two pawns.



Even in those bygone pre-Fritz days, it did not take me and my friend very many seconds to spot the reply 12...Bg4! after which White can resign with a clear conscience (the attempt to harvest some wood for the queen by 13 Qxe8+ Qxe8 14 Nxe8 fails to 14...Qf4).

The final problem with playing offbeat openings relates to one's development as a player. If you have serious ambitions to become a master-strength player, the likelihood is that you will reach a point where your opening repertoire becomes a limiting factor in your development. Playing offbeat and untheoretical openings can work very effectively against weaker players, but once you start facing IMs and GMs on a regular basis, you will no longer be able to count on success with those same systems. Of course, you can at that point start to play more respectable

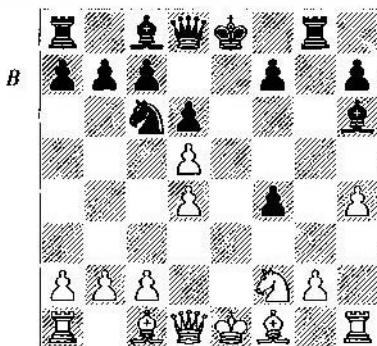
openings, but if you have already spent most of your formative years avoiding such lines, you will be starting the process some way behind other players who have been using mainline openings most of their careers.

I mentioned at the start of this chapter that the use of relatively offbeat openings has been a characteristic of the English school over the past 25 years or so. One example of how such an approach can potentially rebound as a player becomes stronger is the English GM Joe Gallagher. Always an aggressive and courageous player, Gallagher has played the King's Gambit ever since his junior days, and amassed innumerable scalps with it, even amongst GM opposition. He is also the author of an outstanding book on the opening. However, over the past few years, the King's Gambit has been played at the very highest level by such players as Morozevich, Short and others. As a result, it has been thoroughly tested against the very best opposition in the world, and occasionally tested to destruction. The following is one brutal example of what a modern world-class GM can do to the King's Gambit:

Fedorov – Shirov
Polanica Zdroj 2000

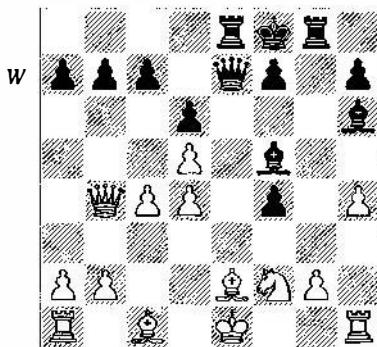
1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 Nf3 g5 4 h4 g4 5 Ne5 d6 6 Nxg4 Nf6 7 Nf2 Ng8 8 d4 Nh6 9 Nc3 Nc6 10 Nd5 Nxd5 11 exd5 (D)

Fedorov had reached this position at least twice before, each game going



11... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, when White has good play. However, a forewarned Shirov produced a brilliant piece sacrifice:

11... $\mathbb{W}e7+$! 12 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$! 13 $c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$! 14 $\mathbb{W}a4+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 15 $\mathbb{W}xb4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8(D)$



Black already has a crushing attack. The game finished:

16 $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 18 $\mathbb{W}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $f5$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $fxe4$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $e3$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}g7$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}g2$ 0-1

This and other games have shown that the King's Gambit, while better than its former reputation, is extremely risky at top level, especially

against opponents who are prepared for it. In these circumstances, it is very difficult for a professional GM to continue using the opening as his main weapon. The reality is that a GM who opens 1 e4 needs to play the main lines of the Ruy Lopez as his chief weapon if he is to count on getting an advantage with White against strong opposition. However, for a player who has virtually never played the Lopez all his chess career, it is very difficult to learn the opening from scratch.

This dilemma is noticeable in the play of several GM-strength King's Gambiteers. Prior to the above disaster, Alexei Fedorov had scored a huge number of victories with the King's Gambit, in the course of which his rating had risen to over 2660. Once he started playing elite GM events, however, games such as the above soon dented both his confidence and his rating, the latter falling almost 100 points. At the time of writing, he appears to have abandoned the King's Gambit in favour of the Bishop's Opening, but although the latter is undoubtedly a safer choice, it is hard to see it striking fear into the hearts of potential 1...e5 players.

In recent years, Joe Gallagher has also suffered some problems against 1...e5. In a crucial last-round game at the Hastings Challengers a few years ago, as White against Igors Rausis, he was already reluctant to risk the King's Gambit against a strong opponent who had obviously prepared something against it. Instead, with tournament victory and a place in the following

year's Premier tournament at stake, he avoided the King's Gambit in favour of the Four Knights, only to fall into a poor position fairly quickly and eventually lose. On other occasions, he has avoided 1 e4 altogether when faced with a strong opponent who was likely to reply 1...e5, the most recent example I have seen being against Mark Hebden at Hastings 2001/2. That time he opened 1 d4 and found himself facing the King's Indian Defence, Gallagher's own favourite defence. Again, he achieved no advantage from the opening, drawing a quiet game. It is fairly clear that Gallagher has never quite succeeded in replacing the King's Gambit, and the resulting hole in his repertoire continues to give him problems against strong opponents.

Hebden himself is another example of this phenomenon. His current repertoire will be examined in more detail in Chapter 9, but he started out his career playing 1 e4 with White. His two main weapons were the King's Gambit and 2 f4 against the Sicilian. Indeed, it was Hebden who taught Gallagher the King's Gambit – in lieu of paying off a large gambling debt, he undertook to 'sell' Gallagher his knowledge of the King's Gambit! Playing most of his chess in weekend Swiss events in England, where beating weaker players was the key to success, Hebden's little-known but aggressive lines were perfect. However, as he became stronger and his lines were exposed to tougher and more professional opposition, they started to yield less fruit. The discovery of the

defence 1 e4 c5 2 f4 d5 3 exd5 $\mathbb{Q}f6!$ drew much of the sting from the f4 Sicilian, while Hebden too began to lose faith in the King's Gambit after some nasty reverses against well-prepared master-strength opposition. Mark's response was to revamp his repertoire entirely, switching to 1 d4 in the late-1980s. Although the switch was very successful, it is clear that having to make such a fundamental change in one's opening repertoire is not particularly desirable. Indeed, in a recent conversation with me, Mark revealed that he has begun doing some junior coaching, and that his approach to openings is to encourage his pupils to study main-line openings, rather than relying on offbeat trickery to bamboozle weaker opponents.

Sticking to the Motorway

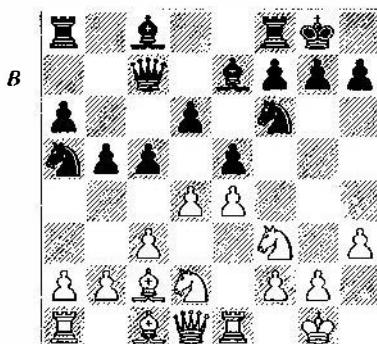
All this leads us on to the alternative approach. The biggest advantage in sticking to respectable main lines is that you can rest assured that the opening you are playing is fundamentally sound, and is not likely ever to be refuted. Of course, different lines go in and out of fashion at GM level, and if you discuss opening theory with a strong professional player you will often hear comments like "Such-and-such a line is under pressure at present" or "Nobody is playing this line at the moment". Typically, what happens is that a game is played in which (say) White produces a new wrinkle in the opening and gets an edge. If the next few tournaments do not immediately

disclose an improvement for Black, the line will fall out of fashion and the top GMs will start avoiding it. However, these periods usually only last a relatively short time before the elusive improvement is found, whereupon the line returns to popularity again. There are almost no cases of a respectable main-line opening being refuted, nor is this ever likely to happen. By definition, the lines we are talking about are based on sound opening principles, and for them to be refuted would entail a fundamental re-think of the basic tenets of opening play.

Another benefit of the main-line approach is that one always has a ready source of GM games that can be used to study the opening. Furthermore, the fact that an opening is played extensively at top level means that what is written about it is likely to be that much more reliable than the published games and analysis of other lines.

A third merit of playing main lines is that many of them offer great flexibility. This can be very useful if one particular variation comes under pressure. Take as an example the Closed Lopez, Chigorin Defence, the basic position of which is reached after 1 e4 e5 2 \mathbb{Q} f3 \mathbb{Q} c6 3 \mathbb{Q} .h5 a6 4 \mathbb{Q} a4 \mathbb{Q} f6 5 0-0 \mathbb{Q} e7 6 \mathbb{Q} e1 b5 7 \mathbb{Q} b3 d6 8 c3 0-9 h3 \mathbb{Q} a5 10 \mathbb{Q} c2 c5 11 d4 \mathbb{Q} c7 12 \mathbb{Q} bd2 (D).

At this point, Black has at least five playable moves: 12...cxd4, 12... \mathbb{Q} c6, 12... \mathbb{Q} d7, 12... \mathbb{Q} b7, 12... \mathbb{Q} d8, etc. Of these, the most active lines are connected with the opening of the c-file by



12...cxd4 13 cxd4. Now once again, Black has several playable options – 13... \mathbb{Q} d7, 13... \mathbb{Q} c6, 13... \mathbb{Q} b7, 13... \mathbb{Q} d8, etc. These lines are clearly all similar, yet slightly different. They lead to positions which have many of the same fundamental strategic and tactical factors. If you play one of these lines for Black, and then a particular theoretical problem appears, you can always switch to one of the other variations, thus avoiding the specific sequence you are concerned about, but still reaching the same general type of position where your overall experience and understanding of the structure is valuable. Indeed, if you decide to take up a line like this, you should try to study the characteristics of the structure itself, without at first worrying too much about specific sequences. Another comment Mark Hebden made in the conversation referred to above was that he generally tries to get students to study structures, rather than just specific lines.

This same flexibility exists in many openings. Taking the King's Indian as

another example, suppose that after 1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 g6 3 $\mathbb{N}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 4 e4 d6 5 $\mathbb{N}f3$ 0-0 6 $\mathbb{N}e2$ e5 7 0-0 you have always been in the habit of playing the line with 7... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$. However, a particular response for White proves difficult to meet, and you decide you need to avoid this. Instead of having to abandon the whole King's Indian and switch to something entirely different, you can just explore one of the alternatives, such as 7... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ or 7... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$, both perfectly playable and respectable lines. In all cases, you are still going to reach positions similar to those you are used to getting from 7... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$, so you will not be wasting your knowledge and understanding of the King's Indian in general.

The principal drawback of playing main lines is that there tends to be a lot of theory around them. This can be a problem if the line is very sharp, such as the Najdorf Sicilian, because one simply cannot play the line safely without studying the complications and remembering a lot of concrete variations. If you are averse to doing this, or you have a poor memory, you are better off avoiding such lines. However, that does not mean that you cannot play main-line openings, only that you need to choose ones that require less concrete knowledge and are based more on understanding. The Closed Lopez lines considered above are one example, and can be played with few or no specific lines committed to memory.

The other respect in which the volume of main-line theory can be a

problem is that one's opponents are more likely to know what they are doing in such lines, and can prepare them more easily. However, this is again something one must simply accept. As with life in general, there is no such thing as a free lunch in chess, and everything comes with a price tag attached. In return for having a respectable, reliable opening, which has been tested extensively at GM level, and on which there is much material one can study, one must accept the consequence that one's opponents are also able to access that same material, and develop their own knowledge of the opening. If you want an opening which only you know anything about, you will need to invent something which has virtually never been played before. By all means do so, but remember the price which is attached to that approach – whatever you play is likely to be unsound!

Conclusions

1) Offbeat openings are generally offbeat for a reason – they are not usually as good as the respectable main-line openings. If you are going to play unusual lines, you must understand this and accept the risks involved.

2) Playing offbeat openings will probably prove more effective against weaker players, since one can thereby get them out of their book knowledge and on their own resources at an earlier stage of the game. However, when playing stronger players, such an approach can backfire.

3) Be careful with books on unusual openings. All too often they are by relatively weak players, lack objectivity, and contain significant amounts of unreliable and untested analysis.

4) Main-line openings are going to be objectively sounder and generally offer more choice of variations within the opening. Also, books on such openings are more likely to be by strong and trustworthy analysts.

5) In general, despite the risks attached to spending too much time on openings, I believe that young and ambitious players should be prepared to get stuck into main-line openings relatively early in their careers. There is no point in wasting one's formative years on an unsound or dubious opening, which one will be forced to jettison as soon as one starts meeting strong opposition on a regular basis.

5 Move-Orders and Transpositions

Paying careful attention to move-orders and transpositional tricks is an essential part of building a successful opening repertoire. We saw in Chapter 1 how a player who fails to think out all the relevant move-order possibilities can come unstuck. However, move-orders are not just a potential pitfall of which to be wary; they can also be used to one's advantage. By intelligent use of move-orders, one can often avoid particularly dangerous variations and restrict the opponent's choice of lines.

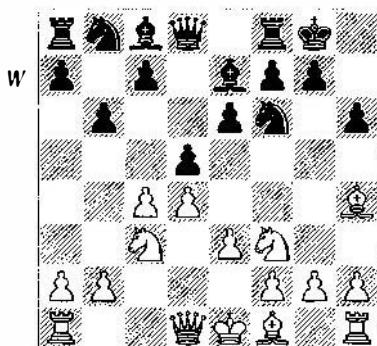
A World Championship Story

The example quoted in Chapter 1 involved the sequence 1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 e6 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d5. As an example of how world champions approach issues of move-order, and how repertoires develop over time, we will look at the Kasparov-Karpov world championship matches of the 1980s, and, more specifically, at Kasparov's repertoire as White in these matches.

At the start of their first match in 1984, Kasparov's principal opening move as White was 1 d4. He had played this as his main weapon ever

since breaking through to GM level in the late 1970s. Against 1... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 e6 his favourite continuation was 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$, avoiding the Nimzo-Indian. If Black then played the Queen's Indian, 3...b6 Kasparov would usually reply 4 a3. This last move, originally popularized by Petrosian, had been moulded by Kasparov into a formidable weapon. In the 1984 match, Kasparov followed his usual policy of not allowing the Nimzo-Indian, and the players had a long series of games with the Queen's Indian. In addition to 4 a3, Kasparov also played 4 g3 in many of these games, something he had only played on a few previous occasions and had clearly prepared specially for the match. As is well-known, this was the marathon match which was supposed to have no limit on the number of games, and it was game 32 before Kasparov finally scored his first win. That game featured his favourite 4 a3 variation against the Queen's Indian.

Karpov's reaction to this was immediate. In his next five games with Black, he answered 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ with 3...d5, transposing back into the QGD. Each of these games featured the Tartakower Variation, 4 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{B}e7$ 5 $\mathbb{B}g5$ h6 6 $\mathbb{A}h4$ 0-0 7 e3 b6 (D).



This line, an old favourite of Karpov's, proved very solid and he drew all five games. In the end, Kasparov actually gave up playing 1 d4 altogether, and in his last three games with White he switched to 1 e4, winning the 48th and final game, before FIDE President Campomanes arrived in Moscow and made his infamous decision to terminate the match.

Less than a year later, the two players faced each other again. Clearly, Kasparov had been working in the interim on a solution to his problem. The result of his work was seen in the very first game of the match:

Kasparov – Karpov
Moscow Wch (1) 1985

1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 e6 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ (!)

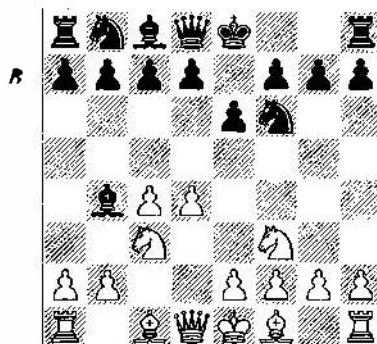
This move was the first clue as to Kasparov's new approach. If Black now tries the QGD, White can play the Exchange Variation with $\mathbb{Q}ge2$, as outlined in Chapter 1. This is generally considered a little dangerous for Black, and most players prefer to

avoid the line. Karpov duly followed the trend:

3... $\mathbb{Q}b4$

Now Kasparov revealed the other point of his preparation:

4 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ (D)



This move had long been considered harmless, and had never been played by Kasparov before. Black now has several options. 4... $b6$ transposes into a Queen's Indian line, but with Black having already committed his king's bishop to $b4$. Although playable, this line is quite sharp after 5 $\mathbb{Q}g5$, and in the normal Queen's Indian move-order 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $b6$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}c3$, many players prefer 4... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ so as to answer 5 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ with 5... $\mathbb{Q}e7$. Kasparov's move-order has denied Black this option. Similarly, 4... $d5$, the Ragozin Defence, is less solid than the standard QGD, since once again, White's $\mathbb{Q}g5$ move pins the black knight. The Ragozin is a sharp and rather risky line, definitely not in Karpov's style. He instead opted to keep a Nizoz-Indian character to the position:

4...c5 5 g3

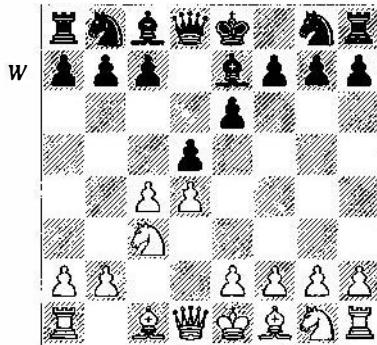
Once again, Kasparov makes intelligent use of move-orders to restrict Black's options. He has now transposed into the so-called Romanishin System against the Nimzo, which usually arises via the move-order 1 d4 $\mathbb{N}f6$ 2 c4 e6 3 $\mathbb{N}c3$ $\mathbb{N}b4$ 4 g3. Now 4...c5 5 $\mathbb{N}f3$ would transpose into the K-K game under discussion. However, in the normal Romanishin move-order, Black is not forced to answer with 4...c5. Instead, he has several other options, most notably 4...0-0 5 $\mathbb{N}g2$ d5 6 $\mathbb{N}f3$ dxc4 7 0-0 $\mathbb{N}c6$. This is considered the most solid response for Black, since in this Catalan-like structure, the white knight is not ideally placed on c3 for winning back the c4-pawn. By his clever move-order, Kasparov has avoided this line, by waiting until Black is committed to ...c5 before playing g3.

With the additional advantage of surprise on his side, Kasparov soon reaped the benefits of his subtlety:

5... $\mathbb{N}e6$ $\mathbb{N}d3$ $\mathbb{N}a5$ 7 $\mathbb{N}xe4$ $\mathbb{N}xc3+$ 8 $\mathbb{N}d2$ $\mathbb{N}xd2+$ 9 $\mathbb{N}xd2$ $\mathbb{N}b6$! 10 dxc5! $\mathbb{N}xb2$ 11 $\mathbb{N}b1$ $\mathbb{N}c3$ 12 $\mathbb{N}d3$! $\mathbb{N}xd3$ 13 exd3

White has a clear advantage in the ending, and Kasparov went on to win.

Kasparov played 4 $\mathbb{N}f3$ in five more games of the match, and Karpov never succeeded in finding a reliable equalizer. In the end, he decided to fall back on the QGD, but using a standard move-order trick to avoid the dangerous $\mathbb{N}ge2$ Exchange lines: 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 $\mathbb{N}c3$ $\mathbb{N}e7$ (!) (D).



With his 3rd move, originally an idea of Geller's, Black aims to get a normal QGD, without allowing White to play the Exchange Variation set-up with $\mathbb{N}ge2$. After 4 cx5 exd5 White is unable to continue with 5 $\mathbb{N}g5$, and must commit his pieces in some way. Then 5 $\mathbb{N}f4$ leads to a somewhat different position from the $\mathbb{N}g5$ and $\mathbb{N}ge2$ lines.

This theoretical duel continued in the third K-K match, played in London and Leningrad in 1986. Karpov started off by defending the 4 $\mathbb{N}f3$ Nimzo again, but after surviving a lost position in game 2, and being thoroughly drubbed in game 4, he went back to his QGD with 3... $\mathbb{N}e7$. This proved fairly solid, and gradually Kasparov started playing 1 e4 more often. The process continued throughout their next match in Seville 1987, but gradually Kasparov was coming to the conclusion that 1 e4 was the way to inconvenience Karpov most. When they played their final match in New York and Lyons in 1990, Kasparov played 1 e4 in 11 out of his 12 games

as White, only switching to 1 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ in the final game, when he had retained his title and a draw was enough to seal victory in the match.

Thus, we can see from this story how top players use move-orders and transpositions to avoid certain lines which they do not like, and to cut down their opponent's options in the opening. This is something every player can do, with some intelligent thinking about his opening repertoire.

Options Trading

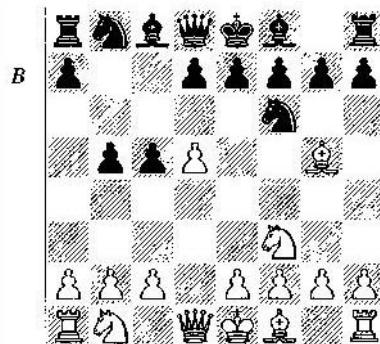
In planning one's opening repertoire, it is vital to understand how each move affects the player's range of options. We have already looked at some Nimzo-Indian and Queen's Indian examples; now let us consider some other openings.

After 1 $d4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ the most common follow-up is 2 $c4$. One of Black's most active defences against this is the Benko Gambit, 2... $c5$ 3 $d5$ $b5$. With this long-term positional pawn sacrifice, Black aims at pressure down the open a- and b-files. Although the past 30 years have seen the Benko subjected to intensive testing at all levels of play, no clear route to a significant advantage has been demonstrated for White. In many positions, White can gain a theoretical edge, but even then, it is very hard to make anything of it against accurate play. In addition, the active black pieces and clear plan makes Black's position rather easier to handle in over-the-board play, especially at fast time-limits. For these

reasons, the Benko has always remained popular, especially at club and league level, and it seems to score very well for Black in practice.

As a result, many players prefer to avoid the Benko, which can be done without actually abandoning 1 $d4$. Instead, White can play:

1 $d4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $c5$ 3 $d5$ $b5$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}g5$
(D)



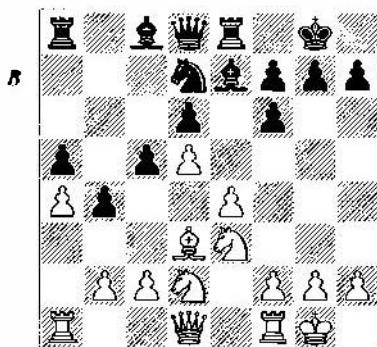
This line first came to prominence in 1980, when six-time US Champion Walter Browne used it to defeat Korchnoi in a dramatic last-round game at Wijk aan Zee. White is aiming for an altogether different structure from the normal Benko. Since White has not played $c4$, Black is not threatening to open the b-file. In addition, White can play $c3$, blunting the effect of a black bishop on the long diagonal. Another key element in White's strategy is the undermining advance $a4$, after which the reply ... $b4$ will allow White to settle a knight on the powerful square $c4$.

Black has a number of playable moves after 4 $\mathbb{Q}g5$, including 4... $d6$,

4... $\mathbb{Q}e4$, 4... $\mathbb{W}b6$ and 4... $\mathbb{Q}b7$. The following examples illustrate the kind of positions White is aiming for.

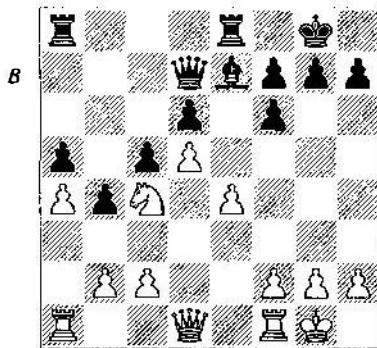
V. Mikhalevski – Knoppert
Antwerp 1999

4...d65 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ exf6 6 e4 a6 7 a4 b4 8 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ 0-0 10 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ a5 11 $\mathbb{Q}fd2$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 12 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ (D)



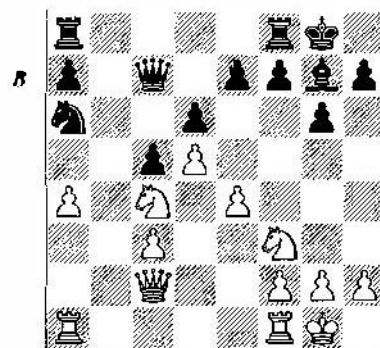
13... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{W}xd7$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}dc4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ (D)

White is clearly better due to his good knight vs Black's bad bishop.



Sakaev – Andreev
St Petersburg 1996

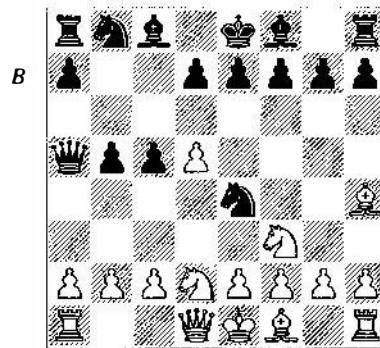
4... $\mathbb{W}b6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 6 c3 $\mathbb{W}b6$ 7 e4 g6 8 $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 9 a4 b4 10 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ d6 12 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 0-0 13 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa6$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ (D)



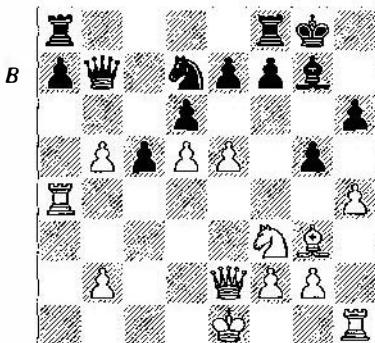
White is better.

Kasparov – Miles
Basle (3) 1986

4... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{W}a5+$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ (D)



6... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 7 a4 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 8 axb5 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 10 c4 $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 11 exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ d6 13 e4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xf1$ h6 15 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ g5 16 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 17 e5 0-0 18 h4 (D)

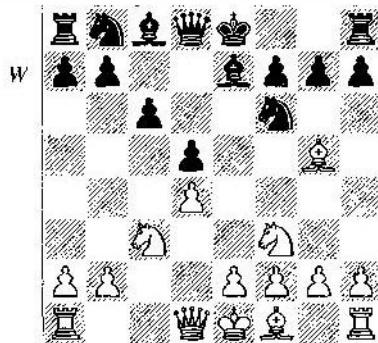


White has a powerful attack.

While I would not claim that this system guarantees White an advantage, it certainly scores very well in practice, and many Benko players prefer to avoid it. If you dislike playing White in the positions which typically arise from the Benko proper, this could be a useful way to play.

However, if you decide to play this system, you must understand that the 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ move-order gives up a lot of options in other openings. We have already seen that you lose the chance to play QGD Exchange systems with your knight on e2. Even if you are willing to play the Exchange QGD with 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$, you cannot really get it via 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$, because the early commitment of the knight to f3 allows Black extra options to develop his queen's bishop.

More specifically, after 1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d5 3 c4 e6 4 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 5 cxd5 exd5 6 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ he can play 6...c6! (D).



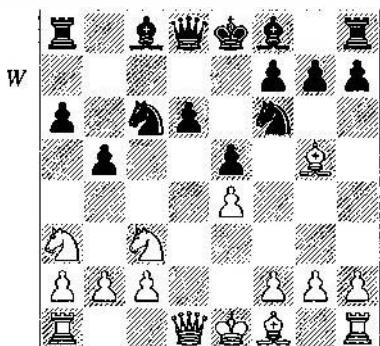
Now 7 e3 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ is fine for Black, while after 7 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ g6! he can also force ... $\mathbb{Q}f5$. After the further moves 8 e3 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}hd7$ Black has comfortable equality. Thus, by playing 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$, you practically give up the chance to play the Exchange QGD with any effect.

In addition, you also restrict your options against the King's Indian. The normal King's Indian move-order is 1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 g6 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 4 e4 d6. In this form, White has a full range of options. He can play the main lines with 5 $\mathbb{Q}f3$, the Sämisch (5 f3), the Four Pawns Attack (5 f4), the Averbakh System (with 5 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ and 6 $\mathbb{Q}g5$), or less well-known lines with 5 $\mathbb{Q}ge2$ or 5 h3. However, after 1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ White is deprived of all of these options, except those starting with 5 $\mathbb{Q}f3$.

The Queen's Gambit Accepted is yet another opening in which 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$

surrenders some options for White. After the normal move-order 1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 White has, in addition to 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$, the important alternatives 3 e3 and 3 e4. The latter, especially, remains one of White's most dangerous replies. However, if you play the move-order 1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$, you need to have another system ready against the QGA, in case your opponent plays 2...d5 3 c4 dxc4.

Another opening that has seen some interesting move-order developments is the Sveshnikov Sicilian. The characteristic position of the Sveshnikov appears after 1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ e5 (this move is called the Pelikan Variation) 6 $\mathbb{Q}db5$ d6 7 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ a6 8 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ b5 (D).



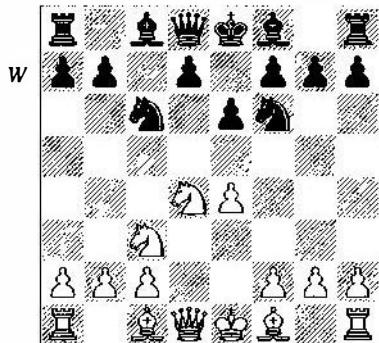
At the cost of ceding the d5-square, Black makes use of his central pawn-majority to seize control of key central squares, as well as driving White's king's knight back to the a3-square with gain of tempo. The resulting positions are highly dynamic (particularly if White now exchanges on f6

with 9 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ gxf6), deeply analysed and amongst the most interesting of contemporary opening practice.

Because of the high theoretical repute of the Sveshnikov Variation, many players prefer to deviate earlier. One way is to play 7 $\mathbb{Q}d5$, but the most popular way to avoid it (together with a variety of other Sicilian lines at Black's disposal) is 1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$. By contrast with the related system 1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5+$, which has a reputation of being rather tedious and usually a sign that White wishes only to draw, against 2... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ the move 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ (nicknamed 'The Awry Lopez' by a leading English correspondence player of the 1960s!) has a considerably superior pedigree. White has a variety of follow-ups, but an early exchange on c6 is common, followed by d3. The pawn-structure is such that Black's bishop-pair will not easily be activated, while White can often open lines on the kingside with f4. In this move-order, 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ is a favourite of many top players, including Kasparov and Adams. Indeed, Evgeny Sveshnikov himself is on record as claiming that 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ is White's only try for advantage!

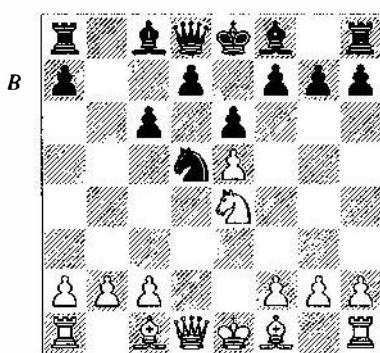
While few players would go so far as that in their praise of 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$, it is true that the line is something of a nuisance for the would-be Sveshnikov player, since it leads to altogether quieter and less dynamic positions than the Sveshnikov. In order to avoid 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ (and a few other possibilities for White in the standard Pelikan move-order), therefore, many players

have begun adopting an alternative move-order: 1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ (D).



By playing 2...e6 instead of 2... $\mathbb{Q}c6$, Black has managed to avoid the 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ variation. The position reached in the diagram is that of the so-called Four Knights Sicilian. However, after White's main follow-up 6 $\mathbb{Q}db5$, the Four Knights proper involves 6... $\mathbb{Q}b4$. Instead of this, however, the Sveshnikov players continue 6...d6, when after 7 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ e5 8 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ a6 9 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ b5 they have reached their intended line, with each side having spent an extra tempo ($\mathbb{Q}f4-g5$ for White, ...e6-e5 for Black).

As usual, however, such a move-order change has its drawbacks as well. Although White has been cheated out of his 7 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ and 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ options, the Four Knights move-order does give White other options which he would not have in the normal Pelikan move-order. Chief among these is the continuation 6 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 7 e5 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ (D). This has become a major battleground in elite GM events in recent



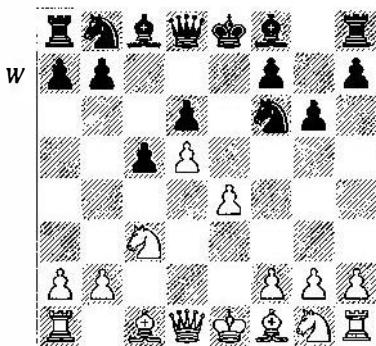
years, with Kasparov in particular advocating the white side. After many trials with 8...f5 and 8... $\mathbb{Q}c7$, the current trend is for 8... $\mathbb{Q}h7$, which has been the scene of two Kasparov-Grischuk games, as well as several games involving Leko as Black.

Thus, Sveshnikov Sicilian players have two options. They can play the normal move-order with 2... $\mathbb{Q}c6$, in which case they have to be prepared for 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$, or they can use the Four Knights move-order. In the latter case, however, they must also be prepared for the 6 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ line. Ultimately, it is a matter of taste, although I personally would tend to be less afraid of 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$.

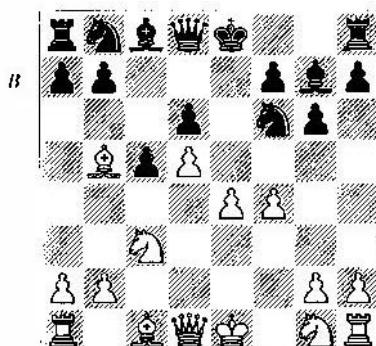
Making a Virtue of Necessity

Although move-order considerations may sometimes restrict one's options, they can also be used to one's advantage to avoid specific variations about which one is concerned. The Modern Benoni is a good example of this: I d4

$\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ exd5 5 exd5 d6 6 e4 g6 (D).



After its successful adoption by Tal in the 1960s, the Benoni became one of Black's most popular replies to 1 d4, even achieving the ultimate accolade of successful adoption in a world championship match (Spassky-Fischer, Reykjavik Wch (3) 1972). However, by the early 1980s, it was becoming an endangered species at GM level, almost entirely because of one line, the dreaded Taimanov Variation: 7 f4 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ (D).

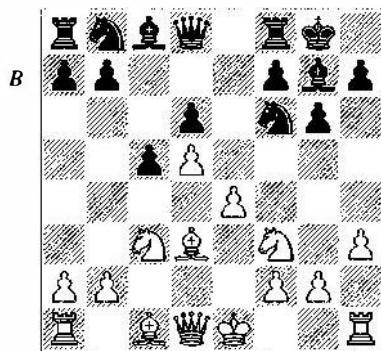


This disruptive check had been known for years, but not considered dangerous after 8... $\mathbb{Q}fd7$. This was because White usually retreated the bishop to d3 immediately. However, in the early 1980s, White began adopting a different strategy, beginning 9 a4!. In a sense, this is a high-class waiting move. White knows that he will want to play a4 anyway, so he does it at once and preserves options with the bishop. Although it may retreat to d3 anyway, it sometimes goes to e2 (or c4 or f1), aiming for a transposition to a King's Indian Four Pawns Attack with an extra tempo, if Black should have to return his knight to f6. Alternatively, White may answer ...a6 by taking on d7, saving a tempo for an immediate kingside attack. A particularly savage example of the latter strategy was seen in Kasparov-Nunn, Lucerne OL 1982: 9... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 11 0-0 a6 12 $\mathbb{Q}xd7+$! $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 13 f5! 0-0 14 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ f6 15 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ gxf5 16 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ fxe4 19 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 1-0.

This is not the place for a detailed theoretical survey of this line, but suffice it to say that despite 20 years of dedicated efforts, nobody has been able to come up with a line that is trusted by leading GMs. However, rather than abandon the Modern Benoni entirely, many of its practitioners preferred to employ a little move-order trickery in order to dodge the above line. After 1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4, they began playing not 2...c5 but 2...e6. If White persisted with 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$, they would accept defeat and play the Nimzo-Indian

with 3... $\mathbb{Q}b4$, but if White played either 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ or 3 g3, they would continue 3...c5 and head back into the Benoni, having in the meantime deprived White of the chance to play the f4 + $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ system. This is the way almost all of the Benoni's leading practitioners now handle the opening, including players such as Psakhis, de Firmian and Emms.

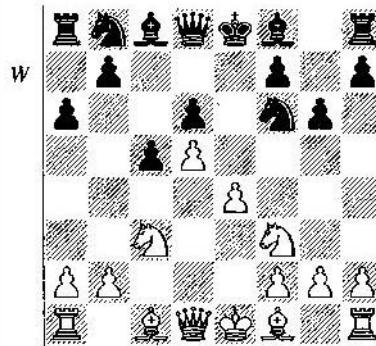
Interestingly, if we continue the story of the Benoni's theoretical development into the 1990s, we find another example of such move-order subtlety coming to Black's rescue. Unable to use the f4 system, players were forced to look for ways to prove an advantage even with their knight on f3. After a few years, they came up with the following system: 1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 e6 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ g6 7 e4 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 8 h3 0-0 9 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ (D).



This new plan, with the bishop on d3 rather than e2, also proved very successful for White. The extra defence of the e4-pawn limits some of Black's counterplay, while the move

h3 leaves Black's queen's bishop short of a good square, which in turn emphasizes the general cramp in his position. Although White's results have not been so good here as in the f4 + $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ system, the line is sufficiently unpleasant for Black to have sent quite a few Benoni players in search of a way of avoiding it.

The solution they arrived at was another move-order subtlety. Instead of the routine 7... $\mathbb{Q}g7$, Black can instead play 7...a6 (D).



Now the natural reaction is 8 a4, after which Black plays 8... $\mathbb{Q}g4$. By this move-order, Black has pre-empted White's intended h3 restraining move (note that the preliminary 7...a6 is necessary, since if immediately 7... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ White has 8 $\mathbb{W}a4+$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ with advantage). If White now plays 9 $\mathbb{Q}e2$, Black has avoided the $\mathbb{Q}d3$ plan after 9... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$, practice suggests Black is fine. The sharper alternative 9 $\mathbb{W}h3$ is also possible, but the complications after 9... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 10 $\mathbb{W}xb7$ are generally considered OK for Black.

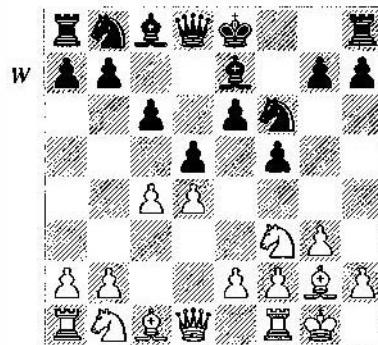
White's other response to 7...a6 is 8 h3, but then Black can expand on the queenside with 8...b5. In the normal h3 + d3 system, Black would not be able to achieve this advance so readily, because White would always answer ...a6 with a4. However, Black's subtle move-order here has prevented White from doing so, and, once again, Black seems to be fine here.

Finally, I should point out that White himself has a way to try to pre-empt this plan. Instead of 7 e4, he can play 7 h3, trying to force his way back to the line he wants. However, Black can exploit the holding back of the white e-pawn by 7...a6 8 a4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$! when, yet again, he has prevented White from reaching his intended set-up. All of the above lines can be seen in the games of John Emms, in particular.

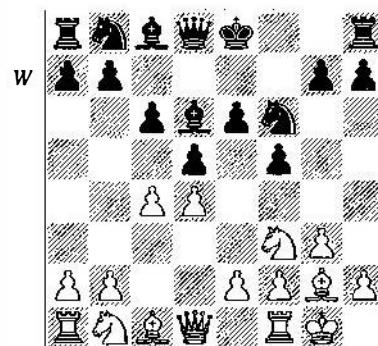
The Modern Benoni is not the only opening whose dubious reputation can be improved by some move-order subtlety. Another example can be found in the Stonewall Dutch. After Botvinnik's successes with it in the 1930s, the opening entered a long period in the doldrums, with Larsen being one of the very few top GMs who ever played it. However, during the 1980s, the line achieved a significant increase in popularity amongst a new generation of players, including Short, Yusupov, Agdestein and others. The young Kramnik also played it with considerable success.

The basis of the new popularity was a different placing of Black's king's bishop. Compare the two positions below:

1 d4 f5 2 c4 e6 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4 g3 d5 5 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ c6 6 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ (D)



1 d4 f5 2 c4 e6 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4 g3 d5 5 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ c6 6 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ (D)



The first variation is the one used by Botvinnik, with the black bishop on e7. However, this eventually fell out of favour, principally because White has the plan (invented by Botvinnik himself) of 7 b3 and 8 $\mathbb{Q}a3$, exchanging the dark-squared bishops. In the modern interpretation, however, the bishop

stands on d6. Not only is it more active on this square, but it also enables Black to meet 7 b3 with 7... $\mathbb{W}e7!$, preventing the immediate exchange of bishops. White can enforce the exchange, but only at some cost. Either he plays 8 a4, in which case he concedes the b4-square to Black, or he plays 8 $\mathbb{Q}b2$, 9 $\mathbb{W}c1$ and then 10 $\mathbb{A}a3$, losing a tempo. His third option to exchange bishops is 8 $\mathbb{A}f4$, but in this case the exchange is only achieved at the cost of a weakening of White's king position after 8... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 9 gxf4. Practice suggests that, with accurate play, Black can achieve equal chances in all three cases.

However, if you wish to play the Modern Stonewall as Black, it is important to understand that you can only reach the position with some co-operation from White. In particular, the Stonewall is generally not to be recommended if White has not already committed his king's knight to f3. If he can still play $\mathbb{Q}h3$, he has a number of extra options. The knight is well placed to swing round to d3, while White's other knight can come via d2-f3, leaving White with the optimal position for both of his knights. In addition, with the knight on h3, White can offer the exchange of bishops on f4, recapturing with the knight, thereby avoiding the weakening of his king-side that would result from gxf4.

One might think from the foregoing that White should simply stick his knight on h3 the moment Black plays ...f5 and ...e6. However, this would ignore one more subtlety. Although the

knight is good on h3 against the Stonewall, it is much less good on that square in lines where Black puts his d-pawn on d6, because it is then much easier for Black to organize the advance ...e5, when the knight would just look silly on h3. Even if the knight moves to f4 before that happens, it will be hit again when Black plays ...e5, and is unlikely to find a decent square to move to (especially if Black prefacing ...e5 with ...c6, guarding the d5-square).

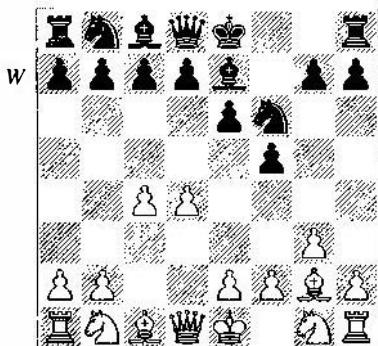
So we can conclude from the foregoing that the Classical Dutch involves some fancy move-order footwork from both players. In fact, there is a kind of waiting game going on – White does not want to move his king's knight until Black commits his d-pawn, whereas Black doesn't want to show his hand with his d-pawn until White has committed his king's knight. The result of this mutual suspicion can be seen below.

After 1 d4 f5, White does not know which line Black will play, but he knows that he will want his bishop on g2 in any case (we are assuming that White plans to play the g3 lines against the Leningrad as well). So, maximum flexibility is preserved by 2 g3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3 $\mathbb{A}g2$ e6. Now White knows at least that Black is not going to play the Leningrad, but he still does not know whether he is going to play the Stonewall or the ...d6 lines. As White wants to keep options of either $\mathbb{Q}f3$ or $\mathbb{Q}h3$, his natural response here is 4 c4, although this gives Black the additional option of 4... $\mathbb{A}b4+$. Assuming

Black is angling for a Modern Stonewall, the obvious move is 4...d5, but this allows 5 $\mathbb{Q}h3$.

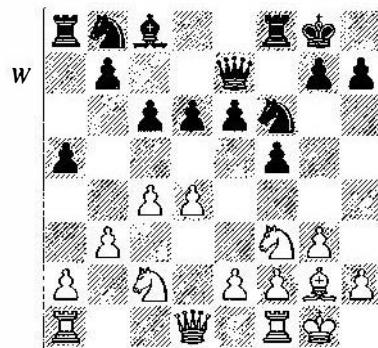
On the other hand, 4... $\mathbb{B}e7$ avoids committing the d-pawn, but now Black can no longer play the Modern Stonewall with ... $\mathbb{B}d6$. The only way to keep all options is 4...c6, when it is White's turn to find a non-committal move. He can do so with both 5 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ and 5 $\mathbb{B}c2$, although neither is ideal if Black continues 5...d6. The result of the guessing game is that Black has been unable to achieve the Modern Stonewall proper, but he has managed to force White into a slightly sub-optimal set-up for the ...d6 lines, in which White would generally prefer to have his queen's knight on c3 and his queen on d1.

At move 4, there is one other way for Black to head for a Stonewall. With the move 4... $\mathbb{B}e7$ (D) he agrees to play a Botvinnik-style Stonewall, with his bishop on e7 rather than d6.



However, by clever use of move-order, he can still avoid the b3 + $\mathbb{B}a3$

plan which is one of White's strongest lines against the Botvinnik set-up. Thus, after 5 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 0-0 6 0-0 Black delays the ...d5 advance in favour of 6...c6. Now if White plays 7 $\mathbb{B}c3$, Black answers 7...d5, and the plan of exchanging bishops on a3 is no longer available to White. If instead White persists with the latter plan by 7 b3 there follows 7...a5 8 $\mathbb{B}a3$ $\mathbb{B}xa3$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ $\mathbb{B}e7$ 10 $\mathbb{B}c2$ d6! (D).



Black is now able to force a quick ...e5, when he has good chances. This move-order has been used many times by English IM Robert Bellin, a noted expert on the Dutch Defence.

These examples show how move-order subtleties can be used in a positive way, to enable the player to reach a desired opening position, without allowing a certain counter-variation.

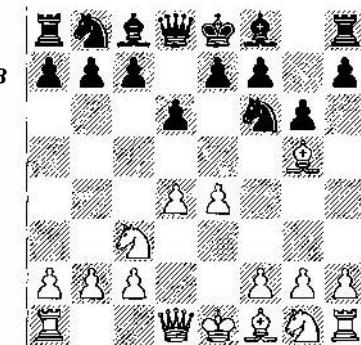
Compatibilities

Another aspect of move-orders and transpositions is picking openings which naturally fit together. A typical

example is the Caro-Kann against 1 e4, and the Slav against 1 d4. By playing both of these openings, one is able to answer the English Opening (1 c4) with 1...c6. Now after either 2 e4 or 2 d4, Black can reply 2...d5 and transpose back into a line which is part of his normal repertoire. It is true that White can insist on a pure English-type position by 2 Qf3 d5 3 g3, for example, but such lines are relatively tame and by using the 1...c6 move-order, Black is able to cut down on the number of different lines he has to prepare.

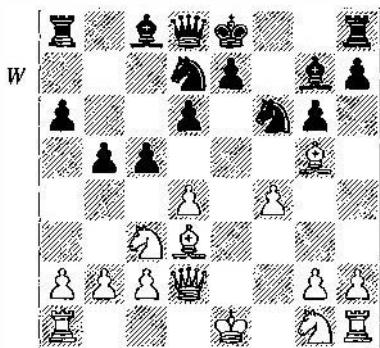
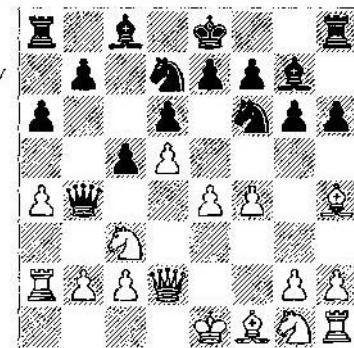
Another pair of openings that fit well together for Black are the French and the Classical Dutch. This enables Black to answer 1 d4 with 1...e6, thereby avoiding the various dangerous second-move alternatives open to White after 1...f5, such as 2 ♘g5, 2 ♗c3 and 2 e4 (it should be noted, however, that this option is not open to the player who wants to play the Leningrad Variation of the Dutch, since the move ...e6 is not an integral part of that line). For the same reason, the French also fits quite well with the Nimzo and Queen's Indian complex, since by playing 1 d4 e6 one can avoid the Trompowsky – very handy if you happen to play most of your chess in England, where the Tromp is remarkably popular! Of course, one may say that the Tromp is not so fearsome anyway, so there is no special reason to avoid it, but on the other hand, why bother having to learn something against it, when you can just avoid it without losing any options yourself?

Within the King's Fianchetto complex, there is a very obvious overlap between the Pirc/Modern defences and the King's Indian. In fact, these lines also provide another example of how move-order may be used to avoid a certain dangerous variation. At the time of writing, one of White's most dangerous systems against the Pirc Defence is 1 e4 d6 2 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ g6 4 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ (D).



The strength of the line derives from the fact that it combines several plans. White can continue with $\mathbb{W}d2$ and $\mathbb{A}h6$, just as in the lines with $\mathbb{A}e3$, but he can also play for an early $e5$ advance, when the position of the bishop on $g5$ serves to create threats on the $h4-d8$ diagonal. After 4... $\mathbb{A}g7$ 5 $\mathbb{W}d2$, 5... $c6$ 6 $f4$ $b5$ 7 $\mathbb{A}d3$ -0-0-8 $\mathbb{A}f3$ $\mathbb{A}g4$ 9 0-0 leaves Black with great trouble equalizing, while after the alternative plan of chasing the bishop by 5... $\mathbb{A}bd7$ 6 0-0-0 $h6$ 7 $\mathbb{A}f4$ $g5$ 8 $\mathbb{A}e3$ $\mathbb{A}g4$ 9 $h4$ Black's kingside pawn-structure is very vulnerable. Black has scored very badly in both of these lines.

It is clear that most of Black's problems in this line stem from the fact that his f6-knight is vulnerable to the e5 advance. This leads on to the thought that perhaps Black is better off playing the Modern move-order in this system, and analysis seems to bear this out. After 1 e4 g6 2 d4 $\mathbb{B}g7$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d6 4 $\mathbb{A}g5$ the bishop does not attack anything, and the e5 advance will not hit a knight on f6. In their outstanding book *Pirc Alert*, Alburt and Chernin give two illustrative lines beginning 4... $\mathbb{A}d7$ 5 $\mathbb{W}d2$, one of which shows the harmlessness of e5 when Black has not played ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$: 5...a6 6 f4 b5 7 e5 and now the thematic riposte 7...f6! gives Black a good game after 8 exf6 $\mathbb{Q}gxf6$ 9 $\mathbb{A}d3$ c5 (D).



Possibly simpler still is the more direct 5...c5 6 d5 $\mathbb{Q}gf6$. Now that White's d-pawn has been lured forward, it is much harder for him to play e5, so Black is able to put his knight on f6 without concern. After 7 f4 a6 8 a4 $\mathbb{W}b6$ 9 $\mathbb{A}a2$ h6 10 $\mathbb{A}h4$ $\mathbb{W}h4$ (D) Black was fine in Krmic-Jausa, Sombor 1976.

Thus, we can conclude that the Modern move-order definitely looks like a good idea for Black if he suspects that his opponent will play the $\mathbb{A}g5$ system. However, as we know from the foregoing, we must consider what, if any, options Black is giving up by playing this move-order rather than the Pirc move-order. He is not himself giving much up, since in most other lines, a timely ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ will transpose back into Pirc territory. However, the Modern move-order does give White some more options. Firstly, he can play lines with c3, which are difficult to achieve in the Pirc order, because of the early attack on White's e4-pawn. However, the c3 lines are not terribly dangerous, so this should not be a major problem.

Much more significant is the fact that in the Modern move-order, White has the option of 3 c4, giving the game a queen's pawn flavour. This is where the compatibility issue comes in. If Black is happy to play the King's Indian, then he need have no fear of White playing 3 c4 against the Modern.

This in turn means that he can preserve maximum flexibility, because he can use both the Pirc and Modern move-orders against 1 e4, depending on his opponent's preferences. However, if Black does not have the King's Indian in his repertoire, and does not want to play one of the pure Modern Defence lines against 3 c4, he has a problem. Effectively, it means that he can only play the Modern move-order against 1 e4 if he is certain his opponent will not play 3 c4. One leading player who does precisely this is Mihail Gurevich.

Conclusions

- 1) Move-orders are vital to good opening preparation and should never be ignored.
- 2) By clever use of move-orders, one can frequently narrow down one's opponent's options. This can mean less for one to study, and can also enable one to dodge a particularly dangerous line.
- 3) Wherever possible, choose openings which fit together, so as to preserve the maximum flexibility with move-orders and transpositions.

6 Use and Abuse of Computers

The increasing role of computers in chess is unquestionably the most significant development in the game over the past 15 years, and in many ways it has revolutionized the game. The use of database programs such as ChessBase and Chess Assistant has now become standard not only at GM level, but even amongst many club and league players. In addition, playing engines have improved so fast that any average player can now walk to the shops and buy for a few pounds a program which is so strong that he is probably never going to be able to win a game against it. Finally, there is the Internet, which has speeded up information transmission so greatly that most major chess tournaments can now be followed live. While these developments have their positive sides, there are also a number of insidious ways in which computers have brought new problems to the game. In this chapter, we will look in more detail at the impact of computers and at how they may be used more effectively in opening preparation.

No Hiding Place

Although a database program, such as ChessBase, has the facility to search

out middlegame and endgame patterns, it is in the field of openings that it has its greatest impact. This is seen in a number of ways.

In the first place, the existence of huge collections of tournament games means that a player's opening repertoire is now an open secret, to a far greater extent than in the past. Prior to the arrival of databases, only a very small number of the master games played in any one year ever saw the light of day. Only the very best games were published in magazines or newspaper columns, with the remainder either relegated to tournament bulletins or not published at all. Those that made it into bulletins would normally be seen only by professional GMs, who made a serious effort to follow all the latest theoretical developments. Few could afford to subscribe to all of the relevant publications, so GMs were reduced to paying occasional visits to the central chess library in their home country. In the UK during the 1960s and 1970s, this meant coming to London for a day and turning up at Bob Wade's house in South London, to beg use of his chess library for a few hours! Those who lived in a country where no such central facility

existed did not even have that opportunity.

The situation today could scarcely be more different. The games of virtually every tournament of significance are now available, free of charge, via the Internet. In most cases, the games can be obtained within a few hours of being played, and in many prestigious events, they can be followed live via an Internet link. In addition, specific publications, such as *ChessBase Magazine* and the *New in Chess Yearbooks*, provide detailed analysis of many thousands of games every year, plus opening surveys, statistics on the most successful opening variations, etc. The result is that any player who takes part in international opens or strong national events is bound to find many of his games appearing in databases. As an example, the *Bigbase 2001* database produced by *ChessBase* contains over 120 of my games, despite the fact that I am a pure amateur, who plays only 2-3 international opens per year.

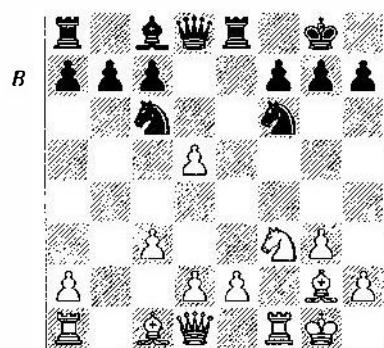
The consequence of this is that a player can no longer afford to have significant gaps in his opening repertoire, because any prospective opponent, armed with a database, will be able to locate these problem areas within minutes. In previous years, a player who lost a game in a certain variation could count on the fact that the game would not be published and so would not be seen by other future opponents. This meant that he could sometimes get away with playing the same opening, even without a fully

convincing improvement, especially if the variation concerned was not the main line and therefore unlikely to be repeated by anyone who was not in the know. Nowadays, only a fool would take such a risk, given the widespread availability of information.

One Improvement, One Point Only!

The flipside of the above is that while in bygone days, a strong new move might catch several victims before it became widely known, this is much less likely to happen now. The following tale from the early 1970s is a typical example of what could happen to unsuspecting amateurs in the pre-computer era, when they came up against professional GM opposition.

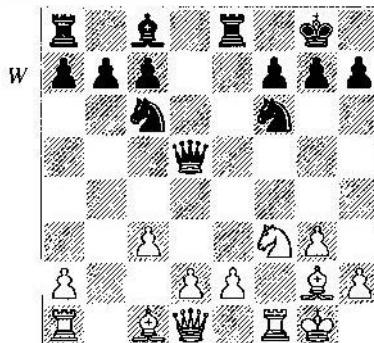
The story starts with the game Uhlmann-Smyslov, Hastings 1972/3: 1 c4 e5 2 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4 g3 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ 0-0 6 0-0 e4 7 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 8 bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 9 f3 exf3 10 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ d5 11 cxd5 (D).



Smyslov had previously won from this position after 11... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$, but here Uhlmann produced the powerful innovation 12 c4!, which immediately places Black in trouble. The pawn cannot be taken because of 13 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ and 14 $\mathbb{W}h5$, so Smyslov was forced to allow White to build a powerful pawn-centre. The result was a typical piece of Uhlmann power play, as he swept the ex-world champion off the board: 12... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 13 d4 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 14 h3 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 15 e5 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 17 g4. $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 19 h4 h6 20 h5 hxg5 21 hxg6 fxg6 22 $\mathbb{W}f3$ (22 $\mathbb{W}a4!$) 22...c6 23 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 24 $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{W}e6$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}afl$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 28 $\mathbb{W}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 30 $\mathbb{W}f8+$ 1-0.

Some 18 months later, at the Nice Olympiad 1974, an unsuspecting amateur from Monaco repeated the white side of this variation against the experienced Romanian GM Ciocaltea. Unfortunately for the white player, in the intervening period Smyslov had demonstrated a large improvement for Black, but despite at least two successful GM outings, the games had not been published anywhere in mainstream chess magazines. The well-prepared Ciocaltea of course knew all about them, which made the resulting Olympiad game something of a mismatch. Ciocaltea unleashed the improvement 11... $\mathbb{W}xd5!$ (D).

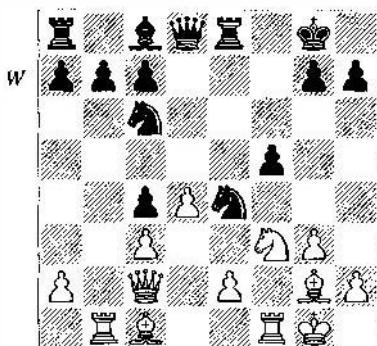
In the stem game, White had continued 12 $\mathbb{Q}d4$, but lost quickly after 12... $\mathbb{W}h5$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 14 e3 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 15 $\mathbb{W}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}bl$ $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}e1?$ (17 $\mathbb{Q}f4!$) 17... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 18 h3 $\mathbb{W}f5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{W}xb1$ 20 $\mathbb{W}xg4$ $\mathbb{W}xc1+$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$



in Sigurjonsson-Smyslov, Reykjavik 1974. Ciocaltea's opponent preferred 12 d4, but to no avail: 12... $\mathbb{W}h5$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}bl$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ (13... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ had also favoured Black in Ribli-Vasiukov, Camaguey Capablanca Memorial 1974) 14 e4 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16 dxe5 $\mathbb{W}c5+$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}f2+$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{W}xf2$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}g4!$ 20 $\mathbb{W}gl$ $\mathbb{W}xgl+$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xgl$ bxc6 when Black had the better ending and went on to win, Tasić-Ciocaltea, Nice OL 1974.

One has to feel sorry for Tasić, because nowadays an improvement such as 11... $\mathbb{W}xd5$ would be all round the world within hours of first being played. In fact, the strength of the move is such that the whole variation remained under a cloud for almost 15 years, until Kasparov surprised Ivanchuk with the new idea 11 d4! (instead of 11 cxd5) and won crushingly at the 1988 USSR Championship: 11... $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 12 $\mathbb{W}c2$ dxc4 (12... $\mathbb{Q}f5$ is safer, with only a small edge for White) 13 $\mathbb{Q}bl$ f5 (D).

14 g4! $\mathbb{W}c7$ 15 gxf5 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ $\mathbb{W}xe2$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}d5+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 18 $\mathbb{W}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$



19 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $cx d6$ 21 $\mathbb{B}be1$ $\mathbb{B}xe1$ 22 $\mathbb{B}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 23 $\mathbb{B}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 24 $f6$
 1-0 Kasparov-Ivanchuk, USSR Ch (Moscow) 1988.

Information Overload

While computer databases make information management a lot quicker, which is to the benefit of the amateur player who has limited time to spend on opening preparation, they also bring with them the problem of information overload. The sheer number of games that are now available on chess databases means that even a full-time professional has difficulty keeping up with the flow of information. The Bigbase 2001 database which I referred to above contains some 1½ million games. The free weekly Internet chess magazine The Week in Chess (TWIC) rarely has fewer than 500 games per issue, and in particularly busy weeks of the calendar can have 2000 or more. This means that making efficient use of one's time depends on observing some basic ground rules.

Firstly, you should not attempt to memorize the many new games played in your favourite openings. Not only is it simply impossible to do so, it is not even particularly beneficial, as I have repeatedly emphasized in this book. Understanding is what really counts, not specific knowledge. If you spend hours poring over the thousands of new games played every week, you are simply wasting most of the time involved.

Secondly, be aware of the quality of the games you are looking at. One of the worst aspects of the modern chess database is that it usually contains a huge number of games from very weak events. Few, if any, of these games are going to teach you anything, or be worth studying. If you wish to research an opening, limit your studies to high-quality games between GMs, and filter out the rest. This leads me naturally on to the next section.

Lying with Statistics

One of the features of chess databases, which can be very useful if employed properly is the statistics and opening report function. At the push of a button this enables you to obtain a picture of a given opening line, its success rate in practice, the specific results scored by different sub-variations, etc. This can provide an enormous amount of useful information.

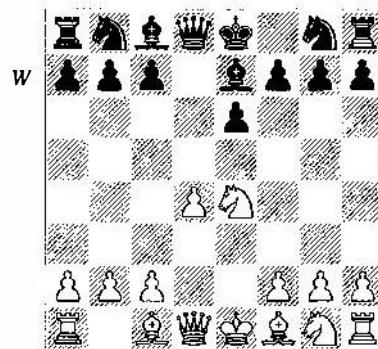
For example, we know that in general, the advantage of the first move should guarantee White chances of a small plus. Statistically, White tends

to score somewhere around 52-55%, and Black around 45-48%. This in itself is valuable information when it comes to judging an opening. If a black defence scores much below 45%, this would tend to suggest that it is inferior. Likewise, a white opening that makes less than 50% should be viewed with suspicion. Of course, such statistics are only a rough first guide, and certainly should not be regarded as 'proof' of an opening's merits, but they do provide a reasonable first indication. Even if a variation is objectively satisfactory, a below-average percentage score may indicate that the position is relatively difficult to play in practice, and this is certainly something the would-be exponent of the line would want to know.

However, in approaching the results produced by statistical analysis from one's database, there are a few points which must be borne in mind. Firstly, as any statistician will tell you, always take account of sample size. The fact that a certain opening line has a 100% score may sound very exciting, but if it turns out that your database only contains three games with the line, one of which, on closer inspection, turns out to be a duplicate of one of the others, this score is unlikely to be statistically significant.

Secondly, quality of games is again crucial. This is a case where the old computer principle of GIGO applies - garbage in, garbage out. If your database contains a large number of games by very weak players, these will distort the statistics you get. I recently

encountered a typical example of this, while looking at the following variation: 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ dxe4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ (D).

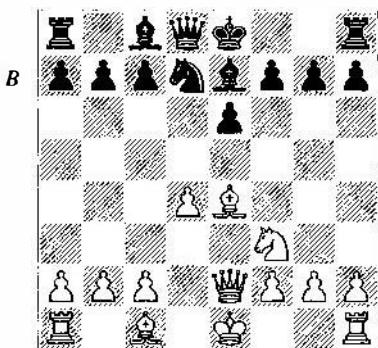


The Rubinstein French, characterized by 3...dxe4, had been largely out of favour ever since the end of the 19th century, when Tarrasch branded it "the surrender of the centre". Only in the last five years or so has it become popular again at GM level, as various top players have realized that its solidity has been rather underrated. Almost all of the recent attention has been directed to either 4... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ or 4... $\mathbb{Q}d7$, but the text-move seems to me to be well worth a closer look. By contrast with 4... $\mathbb{Q}d7$, Black intends to recapture on f6 with the bishop. For example, after 5 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ c5 8 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$, all of 8... $\mathbb{Q}d7$, 8... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ and 8... $\mathbb{Q}a5+$ appear perfectly satisfactory for Black.

If Black intends to recapture with the bishop on f6, it makes sense to play ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ immediately, without committing the queen's knight to d7, since in

some lines, the knight can develop more actively to c6. The 4... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ line was recommended almost half a century ago by Cecil Purdy, the great Australian pedagogue and writer, and his writings on the subject have recently been collected and published in book form (albeit under the unfortunate title *Action Chess*).

Looking through the various lines, it seemed to me that the most dangerous tries for White were those where he tried to preserve the option of queenside castling. This is something which the 4... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ line makes relatively difficult, since if White exchanges on f6, the resulting pressure on the d4-pawn may prevent him from playing $\mathbb{Q}e2$. Probably the best move-order for White is 5 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ (D).



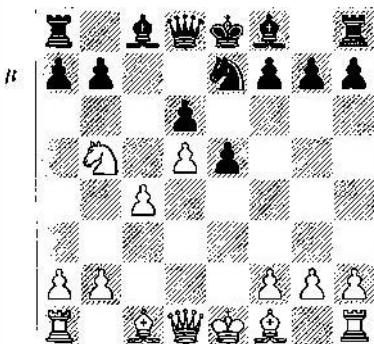
With this order, White prepares $\mathbb{Q}e3$, reserving (though not actually committing himself to) the possibility of castling queenside. Meanwhile, there is also a tactical point to the move, of which more in a moment.

When I looked this position up on a database, I was rather shocked to see the statistics. Out of a total of 38 games, Black won 6, drew 14 and lost no fewer than 18. The relatively small number of black wins is to be expected, since the line is relatively quiet and solid, rather than being a dynamic attempt to seize the initiative. However, the large number of losses is certainly not what one would expect of a line whose chief merit is supposed to be its solidity. It would be easy to accept the statistics at face value, and dismiss the line as being bad for Black, but this would be a serious mistake. Looking more closely at the games themselves, I discovered that no fewer than 11 of Black's 18 losses resulted from Black falling into the elementary trap 8... $\mathbb{Q}f6$? 9 $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ $\mathbb{Q}xb7$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}b5+$, when White wins a pawn and destroys the black queenside. This little trap is the tactical point of White's 8th move.

Once one adjusts for these 11 games, the statistics show exactly what one would expect, i.e. a black score fractionally under 50%, with a significant number of draws and few losses. A typical example of solid black play from the diagram is McKay-Clarke British Ch (Morecambe) 1975, which continued 8...c5 9 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 11 0-0-0 a6 12 dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 1/2-1/2. The veteran British IM Peter Clarke was a regular practitioner of the ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ line during the 1960s and 1970s (although he usually prefaced the move with 4... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ and only then

5... $\mathbb{Q}e7$; as noted above, I consider this move-order to be less accurate than the immediate 4... $\mathbb{Q}e7$). As a tough and wily defender, whose ambitions when Black against a strong opponent rarely exceeded half a point, he was ideally suited to the Rubinstein French, and in his capable hands it proved an extremely tough nut to crack.

This phenomenon of database statistics being distorted by large numbers of games by weak players can be seen in almost any opening, especially those that contain a trap. This was something I realized when writing my previous book, *101 Chess Opening Traps*. It was really quite amazing at times to see just how many victims the same trap had claimed. Here is just one example, in the Pelikan Sicilian: 1 $\mathbb{e}4$ $\mathbb{c}5$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 $\mathbb{d}4$ $\mathbb{cxd}4$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{N}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{e}5$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}db5$ $\mathbb{d}6$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{N}xd5$ 8 $\mathbb{exd}5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9 $\mathbb{c}4$ (or 9 $\mathbb{c}3$).



Even my relatively small database contains no fewer than 27 examples of Black losing material immediately with 9... $a6??$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}a4!$.

Quantity and Quality

The lesson from the previous section is that when using a database to research an opening line, one must pay careful attention to the quality of games on the database itself. Although the Internet has made master games much more freely available than in the past, it has also resulted in huge numbers of games from very weak events finding their way onto databases.

If one thinks about the problem logically, a database is generally used for two, quite distinct purposes. The first is for looking up the games of prospective opponents during a tournament, in order to see what type of player they are, and which openings they play. For this purpose, one ideally wants a database which is as comprehensive as possible, so as to maximize the chances of finding one's opponent's games. In this case, it does not matter whether the database contains vast numbers of games by weak players; quantity is everything.

The second main use for a database is for researching opening lines. For this purpose, however, one does not really want a huge database, full of games from insignificant amateur events, and played by relatively weak players. The majority of such games will not be of theoretical importance, the results will be unreliable, and the size of the database will just serve to make it more difficult to see the wood for the trees. Instead, the ideal database for opening research purposes will be small, and comprised only of

games from quality GM events, preferably annotated by the players themselves.

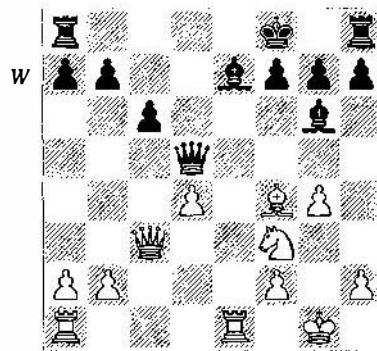
The solution to this dilemma is to maintain two separate databases, one for each purpose. For looking up one's opponents during a tournament, keep a database which is as broad and comprehensive as possible, regardless of the quality of the games. However, for opening research purposes, maintain a second database, consisting of only quality, annotated games. A good starting point would be the CD-ROM of the complete *Informator* series, perhaps supplemented by the annotated games from *ChessBase Magazine*. By keeping this second database exclusive, you should have a reliable source of information when researching openings, while your first, catch-all database will give you a wide-ranging collection of games, in which you are likely to be able to find games played by prospective opponents.

Silicon Innovations

Thus far in this chapter, we have concentrated on databases, but in the last decade, chess-playing engines have also begun to have a major impact on opening preparation. As one would expect, this is particularly the case in sharp tactical variations, where the computer excels. In *Secrets of Practical Chess*, John Nunn quotes an example where a Sicilian variation was refuted outright by a piece sacrifice found by a computer program. A more recent example of this saw no less a

player than Kramnik fall victim to silicon improvement.

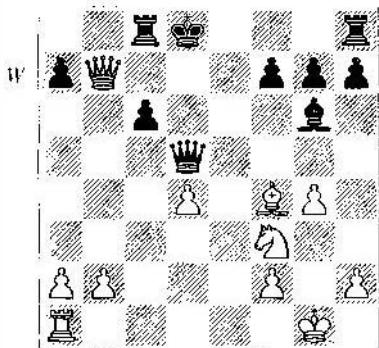
Anand-Karpov, Frankfurt rapidplay 1999 opened as follows: 1 e4 e5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ d6 4 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 5 d4 $\mathbb{Q}56$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 7 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 8 c4 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 9 cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}el$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 12 g4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}18$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ c6 (D).



Anand now played 16 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ and soon obtained a winning position, only to lose it after an horrendous one-move blunder. Interviewed in *ChessBase Magazine*, he told how he returned to his hotel room with his trainer Ubi lava, and began looking at the game. Reaching the diagram, 'Ubi' asked about the sacrifice on e7, which Anand had felt during the game was no more than unclear. Purely out of curiosity they put the position on *Fritz*, and within a few seconds, the program's evaluation of the position leapt to 'winning for White'. Examining the board, Anand soon realized what he had overlooked during the game with Karpov, and duly concluded that the

sacrifice won out of hand. However, firmly convinced that nobody would ever repeat the line against him anyway, he thought no more about it.

However, two days later, Kramnik offered to repeat the whole line, having evidently expected only 16 $\mathbb{A}e3$, after which he clearly had an improvement prepared. Instead, Anand uncorked 16 $\mathbb{A}xe7!!$, whereupon Kramnik plunged into thought, a horrified look on his face. On a neighbouring board, Kasparov and Karpov could barely maintain concentration on their own game, as they looked up and saw what had happened. Kasparov, never a great loss to the game of poker, looked at the demo monitor, realized what was happening, then grinned broadly at Karpov and shook his head in amazement. They all realized that Black was totally lost. Kramnik eventually played 16... $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 17 $\mathbb{W}b4+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 18 $\mathbb{W}xb7$ $\mathbb{A}c8$ (D).



Now Anand played 19 $\mathbb{Q}g5+!!$. This is the crucial point that he had missed during the Karpov game. Black is

forced to open the seventh rank for the white queen. After 19...f6 20 $\mathbb{W}xg7$ $\mathbb{F}xg5$ 21 $\mathbb{W}xh8+$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 22 $\mathbb{W}e5+$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 23 $\mathbb{D}xe5$ Black was hopelessly lost and soon resigned.

Examples such as this demonstrate that the growing strength of playing programs is an increasingly important factor in preparing sharp tactical variations. At present, it is mostly just professional players who are likely to analyse lines in detail with the help of a computer, but one suspects that this will become more common at lower levels in the future. As a result, a lot of sharp gambit lines, which rely on surprise value and perhaps an element of bluff, are likely to come under greater pressure. This has already happened in postal chess, where it is clear that computers are being widely used, whatever the rules of postal competitions may or may not say on the point.

Training Partners

For the ordinary player, computer programs can be extremely useful as a training partner. One of the main techniques in Soviet training methods was the playing of special training games, either to try out an opening system or to develop certain middlegame and endgame techniques. Botvinnik was especially famous for using training games as an integral part of his preparation, playing secret games against such opponents as Ragozin, Averbakh, Flohr, Furman and others. The hoary old anecdote about the cigarette

smoke relates to his training games with Ragozin.

Many modern players also use training games as part of their preparation. For example, I was once given a description of part of Grandmaster Yusupov's preparation for his Candidates match with Ivanchuk in 1991. Yusupov decided before this match that with White, he wanted to play 4 e3 against his opponent's anticipated Nimzo-Indian, something he had rarely done before. Working with his trainer, Mark Dvoretsky, the two set out to develop Yusupov's knowledge and understanding of these lines. As a basis for their work, they used not an openings encyclopaedia, but a games collection by a grandmaster who specialized in 4 e3. The player concerned was Gligorić, and the book they used was the aforementioned *Igraju protiv Figur*, which contains a significant number of games where Gligorić is White against the Nimzo. With each game, they first played through the game and the notes, and analysed the key points. They then played a series of 15-minute games with the variation concerned, alternating colours. By switching colours all the time, Yusupov was able to get a more rounded and objective view of the positions, by seeing them from the black side as well as the white. After a batch of four games, they would stop and analyse the main points of interest in the games played, before playing some more games. Finally, they would check their games against the latest theory of the line, so as to ensure that they had not missed anything of

significance. Having finished with one variation, they then moved onto the next game in the book, and repeated the process.

The results of this work were clear from the match. Out of 4 games with the 4 e3 Nimzo, Yusupov won 2, and drew 2. Both of his wins were excellently played, one of them a brilliancy, and he also missed a forced win in one of the drawn games. Confounding the critics, who had made Ivanchuk a clear favourite for the match, Yusupov won 6-4.

The average player does not generally have access to a master-strength trainer, but this technique of playing training games to learn an opening can be employed with a playing engine such as *Fritz*. By starting the game from a predetermined opening position, one can gain valuable practical experience, which will increase one's understanding of the opening and lead to improved results. The computer can also assist in analysing the resulting training games, although its usefulness here is generally greater in tactical positions.

Conclusions

- 1) Computer databases have revolutionized opening preparation at almost all levels of the game.
- 2) Information is now much more widely available than in the past, and computers make opening preparation much quicker and easier than before.
- 3) On the other hand, information overload can be a significant problem.

Although computers can hold a great deal of information, much of it may be of poor quality, which brings its own problems.

4) Maintain separate databases for game preparation and opening research.

5) As computer use becomes more widespread, risky tactical lines become more vulnerable to refutation.

6) Use your computer as a training partner, if you do not have access to a trainer or regular sparring partner.

7 Universalities

One particular approach to opening repertoire management is the use of universal systems, i.e. openings which can be employed both with White and Black, or against any particular opening move of the opponent. The use of such systems can enable a player to reduce the amount of opening theory he needs to study, and to reach positions of a type he is familiar with and enjoys playing. It is to the pros and cons of this approach that we now turn.

Reverse Gears

One particular aspect of the universal opening approach is the use of reverse openings. Typically, this involves taking a black defence, and trying to play it as White, with an extra tempo. An example is the King's Indian Attack, in which White opens with the standard King's Indian Defence moves 1 $\mathbb{Q}f3$, 2 $g3$, 3 $\mathbb{Q}g2$, 4 0-0, etc. Similarly, the Dutch Defence player can open 1 $f4$, hoping after 1... $d5$ or 1... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ to achieve a position similar to his favourite Dutch line, but with an extra tempo. In the English Opening, 1 $c4$, the reply 1... $e5$ produces a reversed Sicilian, with White again having an extra tempo.

If you have a strong liking for one of these defences as Black, there is a

natural temptation to try to employ your favourite line as White. By doing so, you are likely to reach a position of a type you like and understand, and you can avoid having to learn lots of theory on other openings. These practical points are perfectly valid, and may in themselves provide sufficient reason to adopt the reverse opening approach. However, there is a more fundamental reason why one may want to employ a reverse opening, namely the belief that it should give you an objective advantage. If the King's Indian equalizes for Black, then surely it should give some advantage when used by White with an extra tempo? Similarly, if the Sicilian is the best defence to 1 $e4$ (as many believe it is), then shouldn't White stand better when he plays it with an extra move?

Surprising as it may seem, practice does not bear out this theory. Openings such as the King's Indian Attack and the pure 'reversed Sicilian' approach to the English are not regarded at top level as a serious way to fight for an opening advantage. Alex Yermolinsky quoted an interesting example of another GM's reaction to this issue. The 'Yerminator' was present when somebody asked the Russian GM Malaniuk about the Leningrad Dutch. Malaniuk is the world's leading expert

on the line, and has played it with great success against opponents of all levels. He was asked why he did not play 1 f4 as White, with the idea of answering 1...d5 or 1... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ with a follow-up such as 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$, 3 g3, etc., aiming for his favourite variation with an extra move. Malaniuk replied "That extra move's gonna hurt me." There are a number of reasons for this.

Firstly, on a purely philosophical level, the simplistic argument that "the Sicilian equalizes for Black, so it must give an advantage with an extra tempo", does not hold water. I remember many years ago reading an intriguing book entitled *My Chess Adventures*, by C.W.Warburton. The author was a veteran player and organizer from the North of England, who became a particularly strong correspondence player. Brought up on the play of Lasker and others, Warburton remained all his life a fervent believer in the 19th century classical virtues. He always opened 1 e4 with White, and always answered 1 e4 with 1...e5 as Black. He swore that the Lopez was the best opening for White, and that defending the Lopez was Black's best reply, providing of course that he avoided the "positional error" 3...a6, and instead played 3... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ and 4...d6, *à la* Lasker. From the lofty heights of 21st century theory, it is easy to scorn such an attitude, but Warburton upheld his principles in many brilliant correspondence games during the 1950s and 1960s, against strong opponents.

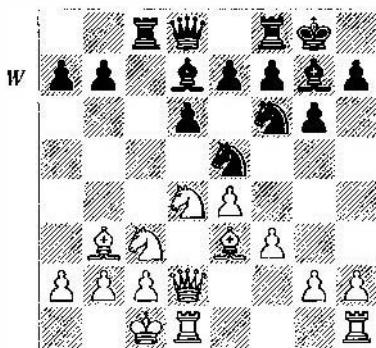
However one may view Warburton's eccentricity, he gave an interesting

retort to those who argued that the English should be good for White, because it is a Sicilian with a move in hand. His response was to turn the argument on its head. Many years of master practice have demonstrated that 1...e5 is a perfectly good answer to 1 c4, and ensures Black equal chances. How much worse must Black's position be, he argued, in the Sicilian Defence, when after 1 e4 c5 White has a reversed English with a move in hand!

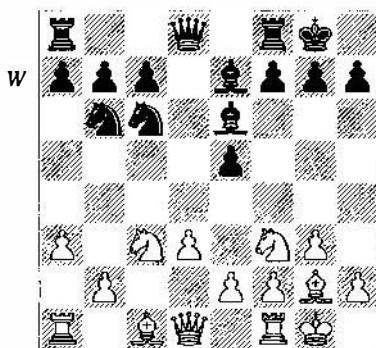
The truth, of course, is that neither of these arguments is correct. Black does not stand markedly worse after 1 e4 c5, but neither does White stand significantly better after 1 c4 e5. The main practical reason for this is that white and black openings generally have different aims, and when they are taken out of their natural habitat, they often fail to adapt well to their new surroundings. Thus White, having the first move, is generally trying to develop some initiative and obtain what we commonly refer to as an opening advantage. The opening lines he chooses are adapted to that purpose. Black, meanwhile, is aware that he starts the game at a slight disadvantage, and that his main aim is to neutralize White's initiative. His play therefore tends to be geared to doing that, rather than to striving to seize the advantage himself.

The effect of this on reverse openings can be seen by comparing the following main-line sequences:

1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$
 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ g6 6 $\mathbb{A}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 7 f3 0-0 8
 $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 9 $\mathbb{A}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 10 0-0-0 $\mathbb{E}c8$
11 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ (D)



1 c4 e5 2 g3 ♕f6 3 ♕g2 d5 4 cxd5 ♕xd5 5 ♕c3 ♕b6 6 ♕f3 ♕c6 7 0-0 ♕e7 8 d3 0-0 9 a3 ♕e6 (D)



In the first example, we have the standard Sicilian Dragon, and in the second, a line of the English Opening known as the Reversed Dragon. Comparing the two positions, which represent the most common main line of each opening, one cannot but be struck by the difference in the set-up adopted by the two 'anti-Dragon' players (i.e. White in the first example, Black in

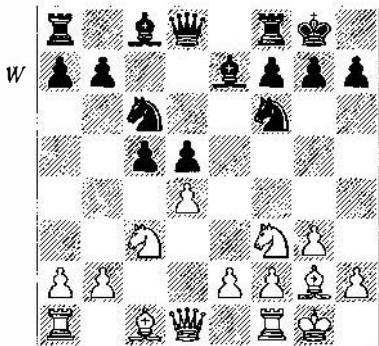
the second). In the first sequence, White, seeking an advantage to justify his first move, has adopted a highly aggressive set-up, castling queenside and preparing a kingside pawn-storm with g4 and h4. In the second example, however, Black has reacted to the same Dragon set-up by adopting an altogether more restrained development, castling kingside and intending to play more in the centre. In this line, Black's subsequent ...f6 move is usually played merely to defend the e5-pawn, and not with any intention of supporting a ...g5 pawn thrust. In short, the character of the two positions is completely different, and theory considers both positions to give White at most his normal opening initiative.

This example encapsulates the main practical reason why adopting a reverse opening does not usually bring any advantage. It is because players tend to handle the position much less ambitiously as Black than they do when faced with the same position as White. If Black were to try to defend the reversed Dragon line by adopting the same set-up with ... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ and ... $\mathbb{W}d7$ that White uses against the Dragon proper, White's extra tempo would indeed prove significant, but against a less ambitious formation, White is unable to make much of it. Similarly, there is absolutely nothing to stop White meeting the Dragon with $\mathbb{Q}e2$, $\mathbb{Q}e3$, 0-0, etc.; indeed, this is a perfectly respectable line of play. However, it is rarely seen at GM level, because it is not considered aggressive enough to fight for a significant

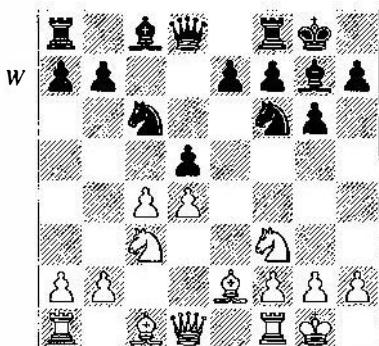
advantage, and most players are seeking such an advantage when White.

I learned this lesson in my youth, after playing the following variations:

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ c5 4 cxd5 exd5 5 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 6 g3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 8 0-0 0-0 (D)



1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 c5 3 e3 g6 4 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 0-0 6 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ cxd4 7 exd4 d5 8 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ (D)



The first variation is the main line of the Tarrasch Defence to the QGD,

which was a favourite of several clubmates and myself. Liking the Tarrasch so much (the follies of youth are sometimes hard to explain!), and reluctant to play the white side of the Benko Gambit, we hit upon the idea of playing the second sequence as White, thereby reaching a Tarrasch with an extra move. The line had the added merit that it could also be reached against the Grünfeld, via the sequence 1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 g6 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d5 4 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 5 e3 0-0 6 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ c5 7 0-0 cxd4 8 exd4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$. Several of our club members played the line enthusiastically in the 1970s, and once we discovered that the leading player at a neighbouring club was also an addict, we even jokingly christened it "The Mid-Kent Variation", after the part of England in which we all lived.

I will return to the last diagram below, but for the moment I would just like to note one thing. My friends and I found that when we played the Tarrasch proper as Black, reaching the penultimate diagram, our opponents almost all played either 9 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ or 9 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$. As White in the Mid-Kent Variation, however, if we continued 9 $\mathbb{Q}e1$, we found that very few opponents played either 9... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ or 9... $\mathbb{Q}xc4$. Instead, most players preferred 9... $\mathbb{Q}f5$, a quieter line which is known in the Tarrasch proper, yet hardly ever played. It was clear that when faced with the Tarrasch position with colours reversed, most players adopted an altogether less ambitious approach than they would have done when White against the Tarrasch proper.

Information is Power

In addition to the practical points listed above, there is another, more objective, reason why black openings are rarely as effective as one might expect when played with colours reversed and an extra tempo. This is because, in the profound words of Grandmaster Suba, "Black's information is always greater by one move". Although the first move confers a certain initiative on White, it also means that White is always committing himself that tiny bit earlier than his opponent. Every move is to some extent a commitment, and each time Black comes to make his move, he has the benefit that White has already made one extra move, thus revealing his hand that tiny bit more.

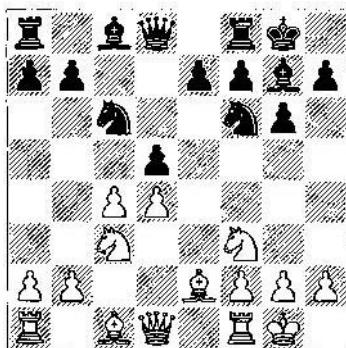
As an initial and extremely basic example, consider the opening move 1 e4. Without Black having made a single move, he already knows certain things about the likely shape of the game. He knows, for example, that White is more likely to attack on the kingside than the queenside. Of course, a queenside attack cannot be ruled out, but if this is what White intends, he is far more likely to open 1 d4 or 1 c4; once he has played 1 e4, it is already more difficult to develop an initiative on the queenside. Similarly, Black knows that a subsequent c4 by White is also less likely than before, since it would leave a hole on d4. Thirdly, he knows that he is unlikely to have problems on the long h1-a8 diagonal, since White has already obstructed it with a pawn and so is unlikely to fianchetto

his king's bishop with any effect. Let us assume Black replies 1...e5 and White continues 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$. Once again, Black has learnt something. He knows that a quick attack on the f-file is now unlikely, since the white f-pawn has been blocked. He may even seek to take immediate advantage of this by playing 2...f5 himself, something he would perhaps have been less likely to do after other second moves by White. After 2... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ Black knows that a quick attack on f7 is less likely than before, since a later $\mathbb{Q}c4$ by White would involve the loss of a tempo. This in turn means that Black can later play a move such as ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ without having to worry about the consequences of $\mathbb{Q}g5$ or $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$, etc. On the other hand, Black also knows that his e5-pawn is likely to be the main target for the next few moves, and this must influence how he develops.

The above was a very basic example of how the information game works, but the same phenomenon exists in all openings, and goes a long way towards explaining why a black defence does not always work so well when converted into a white opening with an extra move. Larsen once gave a practical example of this. At a certain point in his youth, he became hooked on the Najdorf Sicilian, 1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a6. So keen was he on the opening that he started playing as White 1 c4 e5 2 d3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3 a3 "hoping for 3...d5 4 cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 6 e4, the dear variation with an extra tempo." Unfortunately, after a few successes at junior level, he soon

realized that “amongst masters, you cannot persuade anyone to play 3...d5”. Behind the rueful humour, however, lies a serious point, which illustrates very well the Suba dictum. In the Najdorf proper, Black plays 5...a6 only after White has already opened the centre with 3 d4. In order to get his Najdorf with colours reversed, however, White has to commit himself to a3 before Black has played ...d5. Armed with the knowledge that White is now well-prepared for 3...d5, Black can simply avoid playing it, thus leaving White with a pawn move which is not of much real use in other structures.

My clubmates and I encountered a similar problem in our beloved Mid-Kent Variation, discussed above. In the diagram position below, we had to decide how best to utilize White's extra tempo.



If we assume that it is Black's move in the diagram position (as it would be in the Tarrasch proper), the two main plans are as follows:

a) 9...g4 is probably the most common plan. It aims to force White to clarify the central position, due to the threat of ...xf3. White's usual reply would be 10 cxd5, followed by h3, and then g1, f1, etc.

b) An alternative plan for Black is 9...dxc4, with the idea 10 gxc4 a5. Now the bishop must either retreat to e2, allowing 11...e6 (controlling the important d5-square), or to h3, when Black can capture and secure the bishop-pair. White can react to this either by ceding the bishop-pair, or by answering with the aggressive gambit 10 d5 a5 11 f4, with some initiative for the pawn.

Although other moves are possible, these are the two main plans. Moving on to consider the Mid-Kent position, we can draw certain conclusions. Firstly, if we know that Black wants to adopt the ...g4 plan, we can prevent it completely by 9 h3. Alternatively, we can play 9 g1, with the idea of meeting 9...g4 with 10 cxd5 gxd5 11 h3 e6 12 f1, when White has a main-line Tarrasch position with an extra tempo – his g1 is a useful move in this position. On the other hand, if we know that Black wants to play 9...dxc4 followed by 10...a5, there is something to be said for simply 9 a3, allowing the bishop to retreat safely to a2.

The problem for White, however, is that he has to move, and so must commit himself first. If he plays 9 a3, he is advertising the fact that he is ready for the reply 9...dxc4, and it is unlikely that Black will be so naïve as to play

this move. Instead, he is likely to switch to 9... $\mathbb{Q}g4$, in which case the move a3 is of little value to White. Alternatively, if White plays 9 h3 to stop 9... $\mathbb{Q}g4$, Black can play 9...dxc4, and the h3 move is relatively ineffective in this line. After various experiments, my clubmates and I settled on 9 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ as the best move. As we have seen, this works well against 9... $\mathbb{Q}g4$, while against the 9...dxc4 plan, we intended the play the gambit line with 10 d5. This is another line where $\mathbb{Q}e1$ frequently comes in useful, pressurizing the black e7-pawn, which has been rendered backward after 10 d5. However, as narrated above, we found very few opponents willing to enter either variation. Most answered 9 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ with either 9... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ or 9... $\mathbb{Q}f5$, when it is much harder to demonstrate the value of the rook on e1. Indeed, against 9... $\mathbb{Q}f5$, it can even turn out to be a negative factor, since in some positions Black's ... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ threatens a fork on c2!

Universal Remedies

Moving on from the subject of reverse openings, we come now to that of universal systems, i.e. opening lines which can be employed regardless of the opponent's defence. For the present, I will look at systems that only apply from one side of the board, rather than openings that can be used with either colour.

The great advantage of playing a line which can be used against almost any reply is that one reduces very

substantially the amount of ground one has to cover in opening preparation. There are several white openings that meet this criterion, but interestingly, none of them starts 1 e4. The main examples are the English Opening with 2 g3, the Colle/Torre/London Systems and the Veresov Opening.

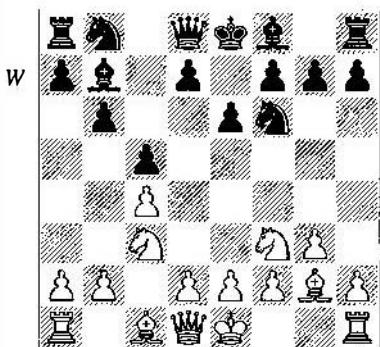
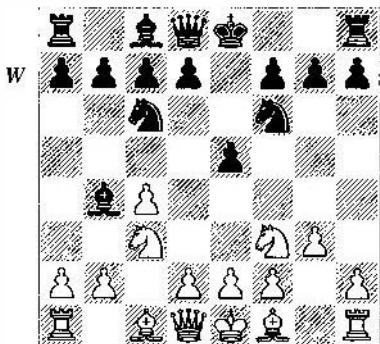
The first of these, the English Opening, has become very popular in recent years, chiefly because of its advocacy by Tony Kosten in his book *The Dynamic English*. At first sight, one may be forgiven for thinking that to describe 1 e4 and 2 g3 as a 'dynamic' opening is a case for the Trades Descriptions Act, but in fact Kosten makes quite a good case for his variations. The thing which enables the opening to be described as a universal system is the use of 2 g3 as White's almost invariable follow-up move, rather than alternatives such as 2 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ or 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$. There are not many normal black responses to 1 e4 that cannot be met satisfactorily by 2 g3, and the avoidance of an early $\mathbb{Q}c3$ also enables White to avoid various defences, such as the following (see diagrams on following page):

1 c4 e5 2 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 4 g3
 $\mathbb{Q}b4$

... and ...

1 c4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ c5 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 4 g3
b6 5 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$

The first line is a popular system after 1...e5, and was tried out more than once in the Kasparov-Karpov matches in the 1980s. The plan of ... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ and a later ... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ has proved very solid for Black over many years. In the Kosten

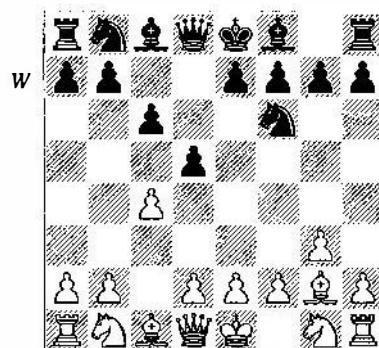


move-order, however, Black cannot achieve this, because the white knights are not committed so early. Thus, after 1 c4 e5 2 g3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ White can answer with the immediate 5 $\mathbb{Q}d5$, avoiding an exchange on c3. By contrast with the first diagram above, his king's knight has not been committed to f3, which enables him to follow up with c3 and $\mathbb{Q}e2$. This seems good enough for a small advantage.

The second diagram is the popular Hedgehog Variation. Black intends to

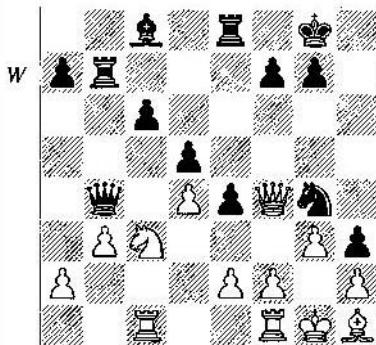
meet a later d4 advance by exchanging on d4 and setting up a row of pawns on his third rank, by ...d6, ...a6, ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, ...0-0, ... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$, etc. This flexible set-up contains the seeds of a venomous counterattack, should White overreach himself in advancing his kingside pawns (those who are unconvinced of the Hedgehog's inestimable merits are referred to the game Vaganian-Giddins, Antwerp 1996!). Once again, however, the Kosten move-order prevents Black from achieving the Hedgehog set-up, because White's early fianchetto interferes with Black's ...b6 move; e.g., 1 c4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 g3 c5 3 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ e6 4 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ and now if Black persists in trying to play the Hedgehog, he runs into trouble along the h1-a8 and a4-e8 diagonals: 4...b6? 5 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ d5 6 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}a4+$!

Of course, there are many satisfactory ways for Black to answer the 2 g3 move-order, despite the fact that certain of his options have been eliminated. My personal favourite is the continuation 1 c4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 g3 c6 3 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ d5 (D).



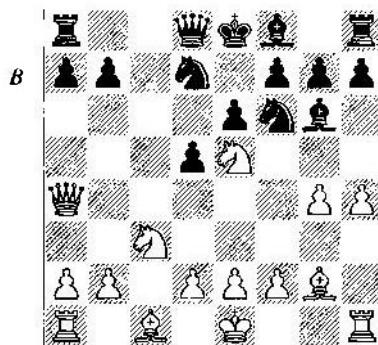
My use of this was inspired by witnessing the game S.Webb-Petrosian, Hastings 1977/8, in which the ex-world champion destroyed his solid English IM opponent in little over two hours' play: 4 cxd5?! cxd5 5 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 6 0-0?! e5 7 d4 e4 8 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 0-0 10 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 12 $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ h5! 14 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ h4 15 $\mathbb{Q}g5$? h3 16 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 18 b3 $\mathbb{Q}g4$! 19 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ (D).

chances. After trying out 4...g6 a few times with satisfactory results, I would now prefer 4... $\mathbb{Q}g4$. Kosten describes this as a very dangerous line for Black, and it is indeed true that Black must tread carefully. After his recommended 5 $\mathbb{Q}e5$, the natural 5... $\mathbb{Q}h5$?! is an error: 6 cxd5 cxd5? (6... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ is safer, but still somewhat better for White) 7 $\mathbb{Q}a4+$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ e6 9 g4. $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 10 h4 (D) and Black is in deep trouble.



20 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ (already desperation – 20 e3 is met by 20... $\mathbb{Q}e7$!, planning ...g5) 20...dxe4 21 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$! 23 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$! 25 f3 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 26 dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 0-1. I still recall the shell-shocked expression on Webb's face as he walked around the tournament room after the game!

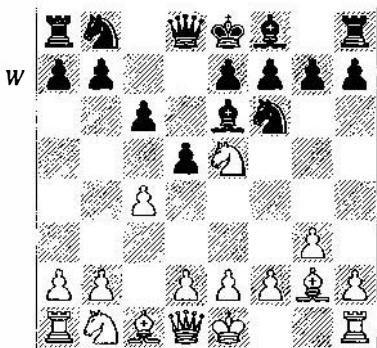
Of course, White can play the position much better than Webb did. Kosten recommends the interesting pawn sacrifice 4 $\mathbb{Q}f3$. Although I am sceptical as to the true objective merits of White's position after 4...dxc4, there is no doubt that in an over-the-board situation, White has good practical



Kosten now considers 10... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ and 10... $\mathbb{Q}c2$ (the latter refuted by the tactical point 11 $\mathbb{Q}xf7$!), but he does not mention Black's other try, 10...b5!? which was played as far back as Konstantinopolsky-Goglidze, Leningrad 1936. This spectacular game continued 11 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$! (11 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ allows Black to play 11... $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$, etc.) 11... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}c7++$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ $\mathbb{Q}xa8$ 14 h5 $\mathbb{Q}exg4$ 15 hxg6 fxg6 16 d4, when White had won the exchange. After further complications, he won as follows: 16... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}hf6$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2$! 22 $\mathbb{Q}xt2$

10 e4+ 23 ♕g2 ♔xd2 24 ♕xb8 ♕xb8 25 ♕c6 ♕f6 26 ♕xe6+ ♕e7 27 h3 ♕xd4 28 ♕d1 ♕e3?! 29 ♕xd5 ♕g5 30 e3 1-0.

However, Black can improve significantly on all of this, by answering 5 ♕e5 with 5... ♕e6! (D).



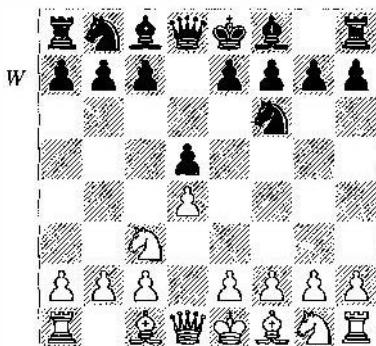
Although not mentioned by Kosten, this was the move recommended as best by Konstantinopolsky at the time of the above game, and it is also recommended by *NCO*. Although the move looks unnatural, it avoids exposing the bishop to further attack by a g4 advance and Black can always develop his kingside by ...g6 and ...g7. *NCO*, for example, now gives 6 cxd5 ♕xd5 7 ♕f3 c5 8 ♕c3 ♕c6, when Black is fine.

Another set of openings which White may use with relative impunity against almost any defence is the ♕P complex, which can mean any of the Colle, London or Torre systems. All are characterized by 1 d4 and 2 ♕f3, with the branch then depending on White's third move: 3 e3 is the Colle

System, 3 ♕f4 the London System and 3 ♕g5 the Torre Attack. These have always enjoyed a fair bit of popularity at club level in the UK, since they are all solid, easy to learn and enable White to avoid nasty theoretical surprises. In general, these lines do not seek to achieve a significant advantage from the opening, but aim instead to shift the weight of the struggle to the middlegame. The first two have not been popular at master level since the early part of the 20th century, but the Torre has enjoyed periodic patronage at higher levels, by players such as Petrosian, Miles, Yusupov and others. As we will see in Chapter 9, the English GM Mark Hebden has turned the Torre into quite a formidable weapon in recent years.

The problem many players have with the above lines is that they tend to be very slow and positional, which is not to everybody's taste. The club-level player who would like to have a universal easy-to-learn opening but finds fianchettoed bishops and c3-d4-e3 pawn-centres a bit too tedious, has a couple of other options. Both start 1 d4 ♕f6 (or 1...d5) 2 ♕c3. Now most players will continue 2...d5 (D) (or 2... ♕f6 if they started with 1...d5), after which White has two options.

The gambiteers amongst you can try 3 e4, the infamous Blackmar-Diemer Gambit. Unless Black is willing to transpose into a Classical French by 3...e6, he is virtually forced to capture the pawn. After 3...dxe4 (3... ♕xe4 is also fine), whereupon White continues in gambit fashion with 4 f3. The

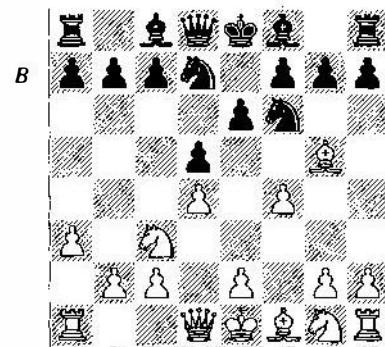


Blackmar-Diemer is a line which has achieved virtual cult status, both in OTB and postal chess, being the subject not only of books, but also of dedicated theme tournaments, websites and discussion groups. Given the abundance of available material, I will not cover it in any detail here, except to say that the **Blackmar-Diemer** is similar to many gambits – not 100% sound, but extremely dangerous in the hands of a well-prepared and imaginative attacking player. In addition, the fact that White can get the key position against 90% of opponents is a significant advantage over many other gambit lines, which depend on Black's cooperation.

The alternative to the Blackmar-Diemer after 1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d5 is 3 $\mathbb{Q}g5$, the Veresov Opening. This enjoyed a brief spell of popularity in the UK in the mid-1970s, following publication of a long article by IM Robert Bellin in *Chess* magazine. Unfortunately, it was soon overtaken by its near-relative, the Trompowsky, but it seems to me that the Veresov has its own merits, and may be worth a closer

look. White's main strategic threat is to capture on f6, doubling Black's pawns, and then to play e3, $\mathbb{Q}d3$, $\mathbb{W}f3$, $\mathbb{Q}ge2$, etc. Often White can castle queenside and launch a kingside pawn-storm. Probably the soundest and most popular defence is 3... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$, preserving the integrity of Black's pawn-structure. White then has several plans. 4 f3, aiming to advance in the centre with e4, is the sharpest line, but positionally rather clumsy and not really to be recommended. The line preferred by Veresov himself was 4 $\mathbb{Q}f3$, followed by e3, $\mathbb{Q}d3$, 0-0 and an eventual e4. Tony Miles played a number of games with this in the 1980s, with good results.

However, for those looking to get even further from the beaten track, there is the intriguing move 4 f4!?. This rather bizarre-looking move is an idea of A.M. Stewart, several-times British correspondence champion. The idea is to obtain a Stonewall set-up, with his traditionally bad bishop developed outside the pawn-chain. After 4...e6, Stewart's patent is the sneaky-looking 5 a3 (D).



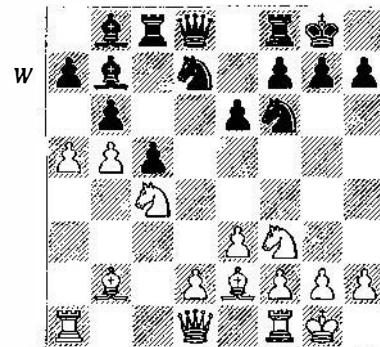
The point of this is to prevent Black from playing ... $\mathbb{b}4$ and taking on c3. Although such a manoeuvre would relinquish the bishop-pair, Stonewall structures tend to favour knights, and the removal of the c3-knight, an important defender of White's weakened e4-square, would more than outweigh the surrender of the bishop-pair. After 5 a3, the follow-up would probably be e3, $\mathbb{d}3$, and either $\mathbb{f}3$ or $\mathbb{f}3$. Although White's 4th and 5th moves look rather artificial, Stewart has won numerous games with this, many of them against strong correspondence players, so the plan should not be underestimated. All in all, I believe the Veresov (with or without the Stewart plan) is a good choice for the club and league player who is looking for an easy-to-learn way of avoiding his opponent's theoretical knowledge. It is sounder than the Blackmar-Diemer, but sharper than the Colle/London complex, and also flexible enough to permit different interpretations.

As a final example of a 'universal' opening which may merit some consideration, I would like briefly to consider the Sokolsky, 1 b4. Unlike the lines considered above, the Sokolsky is usually relegated firmly to the junk-box section of openings, but I believe this to be unjustified. If handled in the right way, it is really not so different from many English and Réti systems. For example, Réti himself used to play 1 $\mathbb{f}3$ $\mathbb{f}6$ 2 c4 g6 3 b4 (including his famous victory over Capablanca at New York 1924), while Smyslov has often played the related system 1 $\mathbb{f}3$

$\mathbb{f}6$ 2 g3 g6 3 b4. My suspicions that I b4 might be more than just a Basman-esque joke were first aroused when looking through some old Soviet magazines from the 1950s and 1960s, in the library of the splendid Max Euwe Centre in Amsterdam. In one of them I came across a highly impressive win by Sokolsky himself, from a USSR correspondence championship:

Sokolsky – Andreev
USSR corr. Ch 1960-1

1 b4 e6 2 $\mathbb{b}2$ $\mathbb{f}6$ 3 b5 d5 4 e3 $\mathbb{d}6$
5 $\mathbb{f}3$ 0-0 6 c4 c5 7 $\mathbb{e}2$ $\mathbb{bd}7$ 8 0-0
b6 9 a4 $\mathbb{b}7$ 10 a5 dxc4?! 11 $\mathbb{a}3$
 $\mathbb{c}8$ 12 $\mathbb{d}xc4$ $\mathbb{b}8$ (D)



Now White made an excellent positional decision:

13 d3 $\mathbb{e}7$ 14 e4!

White has a clear edge, and Sokolsky went on to win a positional masterpiece.

I subsequently located many more Sokolsky games with this opening,

and soon realized that there is much more to it than I had appreciated before. Rather than being merely a piece of tactical trickery, the Sokolsky has a sound positional basis. As in many lines of the English and Réti, White's basic strategy is an early space gain on the queenside. However, unlike those systems, White's king's bishop usually ends up on c2, rather than g2, since from e2 it defends the b5-pawn and supports the c4 advance. In many lines, White reaches a structure similar to a reversed French Defence. Here are a few examples of how play can develop:

Sokolsky – Samarian

World corr. Ch semi-final 1958-60

1 b4 e5 2 ♜b2 d6 3 c4 f5 4 e3 ♜f6 5 ♜f3 ♜e7 6 d4 e4 7 ♜fd2 d5 8 b5 c6 9 a4 0-0 10 ♜b3 ♜e6 11 ♜c3 ♜bd7 12 ♜e2

White has an edge.

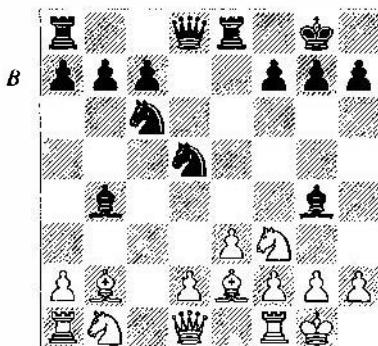
Sokolsky – Anichenko

Byelorussian Ch 1959

1 b4 e5 2 ♜b2 ♜xb4 3 ♜xe5

In this exchange variation, White's hopes are normally connected with his central pawn-majority and half-open b- and c-files. His development lag means that he needs to be careful in the initial stages, but if he can emerge from the opening without suffering any mishaps, he should have the better long-term chances.

3... ♜f6 4 c4 0-0 5 e3 ♜c6 6 ♜b2 d5 7 cxd5 ♜xd5 8 ♜f3 ♜g4 9 ♜e2 ♜c8 10 0-0 (D)



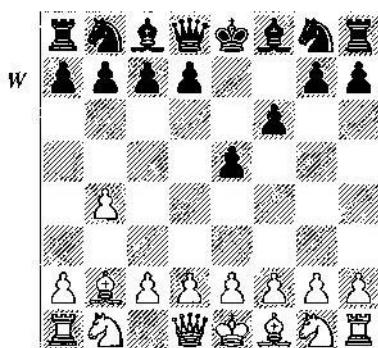
The factors mentioned in the previous note give White grounds to hope for a small plus in the long term.

Sokolsky – Strugach

Byelorussian Ch 1958

1 b4 e5 2 ♜b2 f6 (D)

The most ambitious, but relatively rare in practice.

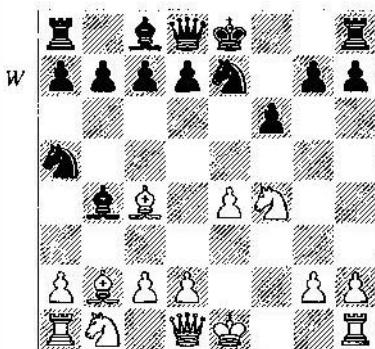


3 e4?!

As the present game shows, this gambit is bags of fun for White, but it is probably not fully sound. White

should prefer the positional 3 b5, followed by e3, c4, $\mathbb{Q}f3$, d4, etc.

3... $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 5 f4 exf4? 6 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}ge7$?! 7 $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ (D)



8 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$?! $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}h5$?! $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 11 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}h5$! $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$! $hxg6$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$?

The critical defence is 15... $\mathbb{Q}e5$! 16 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$!

16 $\mathbb{Q}e8$! $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 1-0

Sokolsky – Pelts

Minsk 1961

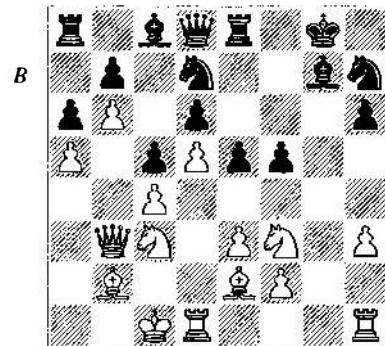
1 b4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ g6 3 c4 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 4 e3 d6 5 d4-0 6 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ e5 9 a4

The start of an interesting plan. The simple 9 0-0 is also playable.

9... c6 10 a5 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 11 b5 a6 12 b6! $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 13 d5 c5 14 $\mathbb{Q}b3$

Now that White has blocked the queenside, he intends to castle there and attack Black's king.

14... h6 15 h3 $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 16 g4 f5?! 17 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 18 0-0-0 (D)



White has a clear advantage.

It is clear from even these few examples that the Sokolsky is a perfectly sound opening, in which there is much scope for creativity and many chances to obtain interesting, original positions. Given its surprise value as well, it is well worth looking at if you are seeking an opening in which you can avoid opponents' theory and to a considerable extent dictate the layout of the game.

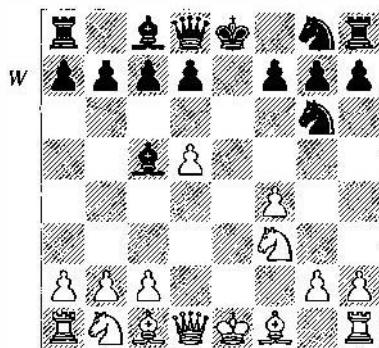
Is Black OK?

Thus far, we have considered universal openings only from White's point of view. Not surprisingly, it is rather more difficult for Black to adopt a universal system, since White's first move allows him much more scope to push Black around. Nevertheless, Black does have a number of possibilities. The most popular one is the Pirc/Modern complex, which I will discuss in the next section. Another option for Black, which I shall consider here, is 1... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ against anything.

It is not unfair to say that for most of the 1980s and 1990s, 1... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ was one of the great undiscovered secrets of opening theory. It was hardly played or taken seriously by anyone, despite the fact that Tony Miles had been terrorizing the GM circuit with it for years. The following massacre illustrates the damage Tony was able to do with it:

Gerusel – Miles
Porz 1982

1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 2 d5 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 3 f4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 4 e4 e6 5 $\mathbb{Q}f3$?! exd5 6 exd5 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ (D)

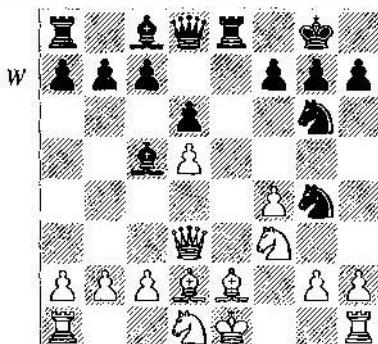


White's decision to treat the opening like a left-handed Alekhine is already looking suspect, as his king is prevented from castling kingside.

7 $\mathbb{W}d3$ d6 8 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 0-0 10 $\mathbb{Q}d2$

White is now finally ready to evacuate his king from the centre, but at the last moment, Miles strikes out to prevent this.

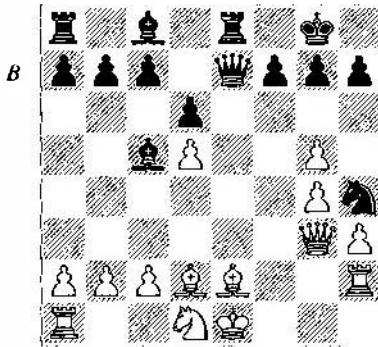
10... $\mathbb{Q}g4$! 11 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ (D)



Already White's position is a shambles. Unable to see any way of completing normal development, he now lashes out in desperation, but the retribution is not long in coming.

12 h3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 13 g4 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$
15 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 16 fxg5 $\mathbb{W}e7$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ (D)

Miles now finally annexes material with a move sufficiently photogenic as to deserve another diagram:



17... $\mathbb{Q}g1$!

Personally, I would have been embarrassed enough to resign here, but

Gerusel struggled on for a few more moves.

18 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}h1+$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}f3+$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 0-1

I recall myself once suffering a similarly drastic defeat in a blitz tournament in Moscow, as White against IM Nikolai Vlasov, another 1... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ devotee. Thankfully, I can't remember the exact course of the game, but I know it started 1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 2 c4 e5 3 d5 $\mathbb{Q}ce7$ 4 e4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$, and ended not many moves later, when something landed on g4 and the f2-square collapsed!

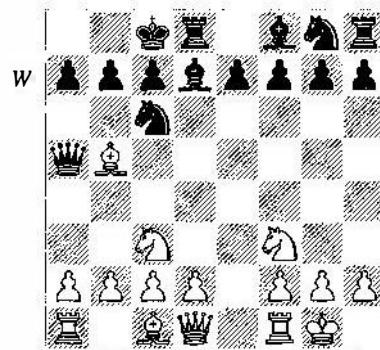
The basic idea of this system is to play 1... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ and 2...e5. Thus, the typical main lines go 1 e4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 2 d4 e5 and 1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 2 c4 e5. It should be noted that in the former line, Nimzowitsch himself used to prefer 2...d5, but this leads to a different type of game, and does not enjoy a very good theoretical reputation nowadays. By contrast, the positions after 2...e5 seem perfectly OK for Black. Indeed, after 1 e4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 2 d4 e5, it may well be that White's best try for an advantage is to transpose into a Scotch with 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$. Over the past decade or so, the Scotch has become a serious alternative to the Ruy Lopez, even at the highest level. Nonetheless, there is no reason why Black should not be able to equalize, providing he is well prepared, and the possibility of transposition into a Scotch should not worry the would-be 1... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ player.

Ironically, the most critical challenge to 1 e4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ is probably 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$.

Of course, Black can now play 2...e5, transposing into normal 1 e4 c5 main lines (with some of White's options cut out, e.g. the King's Gambit, Vienna, etc.), but the player who chooses 1... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ to avoid main-line theory will want an independent alternative. There are three possibilities.

Nimzowitsch's preference was for 2...e6, which after 3 d4 d5 transposes into an unusual kind of French Defence. Although the line is just about playable, I cannot recommend it, as the position of the black knight on c6 obstructs the thematic French freeing advance ...c5.

Option two is the move 2...d5, which will transpose into a variation of the Centre Counter (or Scandinavian Defence, as it is more generally known nowadays). This is a favourite of the aforementioned IM Vlasov, who has published extensive analysis of the lines following 3 exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 6 0-0 0-0 (D).



These lines are extremely sharp, and while it is difficult to trust the

black position entirely, it is likely to prove effective in the hands of a well-prepared player. For those looking for a sharp tactical fight, with plenty of opportunities to seize the initiative as Black, these lines can be recommended for further study.

However, the most popular option is 2...d6. This was the line preferred by Tony Miles, and one with which he won numerous games. However, he met his Waterloo in 1995, in the following game:

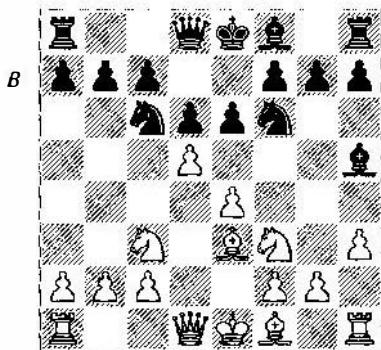
Illescas – Miles

Linares Z 1995

1 e4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}e3$!

This is the start of White's most accurate plan. Until this game, theory had generally recommended 5... $\mathbb{Q}b5$ as strongest, but Miles demonstrated in a number of games that Black's position is satisfactory after 5...a6 6 $\mathbb{Q}xc6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$, Ligterink-Miles, Wijk aan Zee 1984 being one drastic example.

5...e6 6 h3 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 7 d5! (D)



Again, the most accurate, pre-empting Black's plan of playing ...d5 himself.

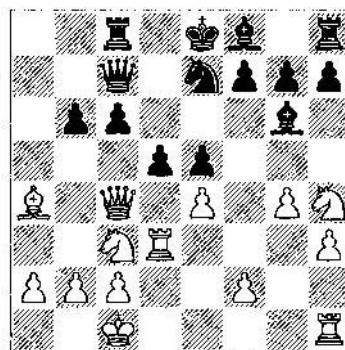
7... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}b5$!

Emphasizing the drawback of the queen's bishop's absence from the black queenside.

8... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 12 g4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 13 0-0-0

It is clear that White has a significant advantage, with more space, better development and the safer king. He went on to win an attractive sacrificial game:

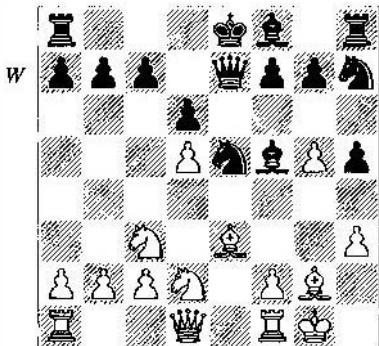
13...e5 14 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}d3!$ d5 (D)
17...b5 loses to 18 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xb5+$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}c3$.



18 exd5! $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ g6 21 d6 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ b5 24 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 25 dxe7+ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}d7!$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ + $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ + 1-0

After this rather crushing defeat, Miles's enthusiasm for 2...d6 waned rapidly. After a few, largely unsuccessful, experiments with 5...a6 (so as

to prevent the check on b5) he switched to answering 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ with 2...e5. Players who wish to continue using 2...d6 clearly need to find some improvement here. Illescas himself suggested 9... $\mathbb{Q}xc6$, with only a small advantage for White. Another try is 7...exd5 8 exd5 $\mathbb{Q}e5$, when White's most critical line is probably 9 g4 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}d2$, planning to drive Black back with f4. However, after 10... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ h5! 12 g5 $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 13 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ (D) the position was fairly unclear in de la Riva-Spraggett, Santiago 1995.



White eventually won that game, but not because of the opening. This is another avenue that 2...d6 exponents may wish to explore further.

Colour-Blindness

The final universal system I wish to discuss is the most universal of all, in that it can be played with both colours, as well as against virtually any opposing set-up. I refer to the King's Indian/Pirc/Modern complex. These

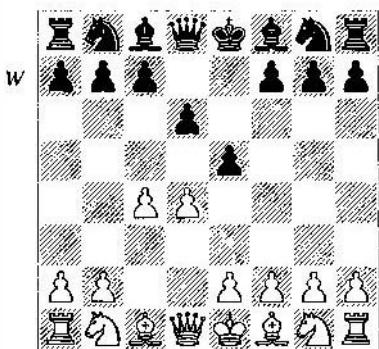
lines are characterized by a kingside fianchetto, with such moves as ...g6, ... $\mathbb{Q}g7$, ...d6, ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, etc., or their equivalents as White. The lack of early central contact is what makes these systems so universal, because it means that there is little chance of violent early contact knocking the player out of his preferred scheme.

With Black, the principal move-order decision against 1 e4 is whether to play the Modern (1...g6) or the Pirc (1...d6 2 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ g6) move-order. As mentioned earlier, the decision depends mainly on how Black intends to play against a set-up with c4. If Black is happy to defend a King's Indian proper, he can play 1...g6. Thus, after 1 e4 g6 2 d4 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 3 c4 d6 4 $\mathbb{Q}c3$, the move 4... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ transposes into the King's Indian proper. Alternatively, Black has other options involving delaying ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, such as 4... $\mathbb{Q}c6$, 4... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ and 4...e5. However, at the time of writing, none of these non-KID options looks terribly good from a theoretical perspective, although certain Modern Defence die-hards, such as Azmaiparashvili, continue to play them.

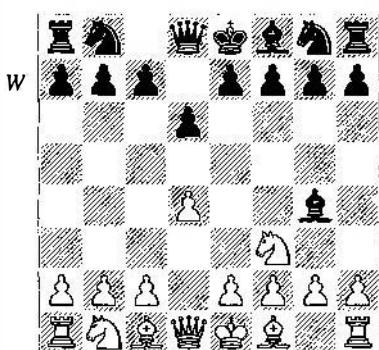
If Black is not happy with these lines, he needs to play the Pirc move-order, only committing himself to a kingside fianchetto after White has blocked his c-pawn with $\mathbb{Q}c3$. On the face of it, this might seem to mean that he no longer has a universal defence as Black, since after 1 d4 d6 White is not forced to play 2 e4, but can prefer 2 c4 or 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$. Now 2...g6 would allow White to force Black back into lines he wishes to avoid (e.g. 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ g6 3 c4).

However, in recent years, an alternative repertoire has evolved based on 2 c4 e5 and 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$:

1 d4 d6 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ (D)



1 d4 d6 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ (D)



One important step in the development of this repertoire was the realization that, in the first diagram, Black has nothing to fear in the ending after the exchanges on e5 and d8. By contrast to the Berlin Defence ending we discussed in Chapter 3, here the black

king will find a secure spot on c7 (after the pawn advance ...c6), and his development is comfortable. In practice, Black has a healthy plus score from the position after 3 dxe5 dxe5 4 $\mathbb{W}xd8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$, and even after allowing for the fact that in the majority of games Black is the stronger player, it is clear that Black's chances are fully equal at least.

Since the advance 3 d5 also brings nothing (Black can develop in several ways, 3...f5 followed by 4... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ being one of the simplest), White's main try from the penultimate diagram is 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$. Play then continues 3...e4 4 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ f5, which, once again, has proved very robust in practice. Both sides have a lot of flexibility in how they develop, but Black's basic plan is generally to play ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, ...0-0, ...c6, ... $\mathbb{Q}a6-c7$, etc. Alternatively, he can advance ...c5, trying to induce the reply d5, which would give him the c5-square for his pieces. The resulting positions offer good chances for Black.

In the second diagram, Black will answer 3 e4 with 3... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ e6, followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, ...0-0 and ...d5. His intention is to aim for a French-style pawn-structure, but with his light-squared bishop developed outside the pawn-chain. Black's results here have been very respectable. A more critical plan for White is 3 c4, but here he must reckon on the exchange ... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$, damaging his pawn-structure. Mickey Adams is one top player who has defended these lines successfully as Black. All in all, the 1...d6 repertoire seems to offer many

interesting possibilities for Black, while remaining less explored than most main lines.

As White, there is also some move-order choice. The standard King's Indian Attack usually starts with 1 $\mathbb{Q}f3$, followed by 2 g3, 3 $\mathbb{A}g2$, etc. However, White can also start with 1 g3, which offers slightly more flexibility and scope for originality. The English GM David Norwood is an example of a player who uses 1 g3 and 1...g6 exclusively.

Universal Problems

In the foregoing, we have discussed the advantages of a universal opening approach – less to study, the ability to reach positions and structures one is familiar with, etc. For the amateur player especially, these are significant benefits. However, there is one great disadvantage to such an approach, and that is the limiting of one's understanding to just a small group of positions. We discussed the same problem in Chapter 2, in the context of concentrating on a very narrow opening repertoire. Using a universal system is really just a more extreme application

of the same policy, and the same drawbacks apply. If you exclusively play 1 g3 as White and 1...g6 as Black, you are going to restrict your practical experience to a relatively narrow range of positions, and in the long run this will not be good for the overall development of your chess understanding. As a result, young and ambitious players should think seriously before adopting such an approach. Although it can bring undoubted practical benefits in the short term, it can prove a limiting factor later in a player's development.

Conclusions

- 1) Universal systems can save a player a great deal of time and preparation by reducing the number of different openings he needs to study.
- 2) Playing 'black' openings as White with a move in hand rarely promises a significant advantage, despite the extra tempo.
- 3) The main drawback of universal systems is that a player restricts the range of positions and structures that he plays, which in turn can limit his development as a player.

8 Infidelity and Divorce

Hitherto, we have considered issues surrounding the formation of an opening repertoire. I now want to discuss situations where a player deviates from his normal repertoire, either for a one-off game, or as a more permanent change in his repertoire.

“I Didn’t Play My Usual Line Because...”

The first situation to consider is the temporary deviation from one’s normal repertoire, in a specific, one-off game. This may be for a number of reasons, which can be either positive or negative.

One of the most common reasons to depart from one’s normal repertoire is a desire to avoid the opponent’s preparation. This may be a fear that the opponent has prepared a specific line for that actual game, perhaps because he knows your play and has seen you play a certain line before. Maybe you have even played the line against the same opponent previously, and therefore believe that he has prepared an improvement. Alternatively, you may just have a general fear of a certain opponent’s theoretical knowledge – having seen the opponent at other chess events, you know that he is a player

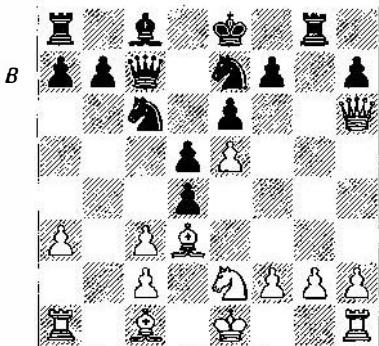
who knows his chosen lines very well, or you know that he always plays a particularly unpleasant line against your favourite opening. For one or more of these reasons, you decide to depart from your normal line and play something he will not expect.

To a certain extent, the degree of success you can expect from such switches depends on how broad your own repertoire is. If you have a very narrow repertoire, and do not know very much about openings other than those you play regularly, it is going to be difficult to adjust to playing something new. On the other hand, if you are accustomed to playing a wide variety of systems, it is easier to avoid a certain line, without ending up in something totally unfamiliar.

In general, just as I believe that most amateur players should stick to a relatively narrow repertoire, so I also believe that it is generally a mistake to depart from one’s normal lines just because of fear of an opponent’s preparation. In this belief, I am supported by Grandmaster Yermolinsky, who had the following to say on this subject in his book *The Road to Chess Improvement*: “... no player should ever abandon his openings out of fear of the opponent’s superior preparation. Often I see my students going into inferior

lines because 'Oh, I didn't want to play a normal line, I've seen him play this stuff so many times...'. To reveal a little secret, I study theoretical lines in the hope that my opponents will avoid them! Nothing makes a GM happier than when his less experienced opponent gets 'creative' from the very first moves. Don't make that mistake. If you think your openings are good, play them against anyone, especially grandmasters!"

I have myself fallen into the trap he describes, with disastrous results. In the 1990 British Championship, I lost a bad game against Dave Coleman in the line 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 4 c5 c5 5 a3 $\mathbb{Q}xc3+$ 6 bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}d3$. This sharp move, little known at the time, was a favourite of my opponent, whereas I had never met it before. The least sharp reply is 8...c4, but bitter experience has taught me (and continues to teach me) that this move is almost always wrong in the Winawer, so I headed for complications: 8...cxd4 9 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}bc6$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}h6!?$ (D).

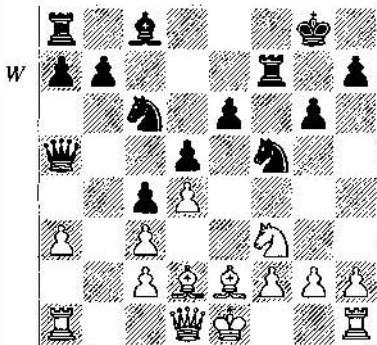


This last move, instead of the more obvious 1 $\mathbb{Q}xh7$, came as a complete surprise. I subsequently discovered that it had been awarded an exclamation mark by no less an authority than Uhlmann. White's idea is to take on h7 with the bishop, forcing the black rook to make an important decision. Taken by surprise, I played too passively, fell into a very difficult position, and eventually lost.

Although unpleasant, such a loss is to some extent forgivable. Falling into a little-known, highly sharp variation, of which one's opponent happens to have made a speciality, is something which can happen to anybody (it certainly could in those pre-computer days). What was not forgivable, however, was the sequel. Despite having analysed the line and prepared some improvements, when I found myself facing the same opponent a few months later in the Hastings Challengers, I lacked the confidence to repeat the opening. Instead, I made a spur-of-the-moment decision to play something else, and chose 1...e5. All I succeeded in doing was jumping from a warm frying pan into an extremely hot fire, as my opponent rattled out a sharp line of the Göring Gambit, 1 e4 e5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 d4 exd4 4 c3, another of his favourites. Knowing even less about this than I had previously known about the 8 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ Winawer, I was soon in the toils and lost in 25 moves.

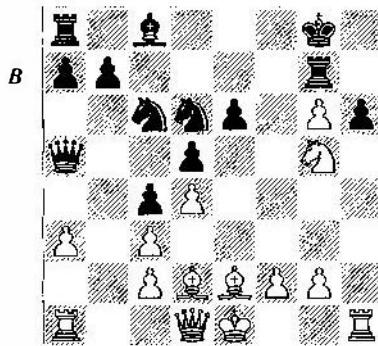
It is nice to be able, for once at least, to say that I learnt from my mistake. In the Gausdal Troll Masters 1994, I had the following opening as Black

against Swedish GM and theoretical expert, Thomas 'The Hit-man' Ernst: 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{A}b4$ 4 e5 c5 5 a3 $\mathbb{A}xc3+$ 6 bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 7 $\mathbb{W}g4$ 0-0 8 $\mathbb{A}d3$ f5 9 exf6 $\mathbb{A}xf6$ 10 $\mathbb{A}g5$ $\mathbb{B}f7$ 11 $\mathbb{W}h5$ g6 12 $\mathbb{W}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}bc6$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 14 $\mathbb{A}d2$ c4 15 $\mathbb{A}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ (D).



Thus far, we were following my pre-game preparation, but in this position, instead of the usual 16 0-0, Ernst produced the new move 16 h4, the sort of direct approach that his pugilistic nickname would lead one to expect. After due thought, I decided to follow the classic recipe of answering a wing attack with a counter in the centre, and continued 16... $\mathbb{A}d7$ 17 h5 e5 but after the further moves 18 hxg6 hxg6 19 dx5 $\mathbb{A}e8$ 20 g4 $\mathbb{A}g7$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}g5$! I was unable to justify the loss of material. Despite some desperate attempts to land a haymaker punch, I duly went down after 21... $\mathbb{B}fe7$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}h7$ $\mathbb{A}xe5$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{A}f7$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ $\mathbb{A}xg4$ 25 f3 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ $\mathbb{A}g8$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{A}xf3$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{A}xh1$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 30 $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{A}f5+$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ 1-0.

In the post-mortem, we started analysing the alternative reply 16... $\mathbb{Q}d6$. After 17 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{B}g7$ 18 h5 h6 Ernst declared that the piece sacrifice 19 hxg6 (D) yielded White a winning attack.

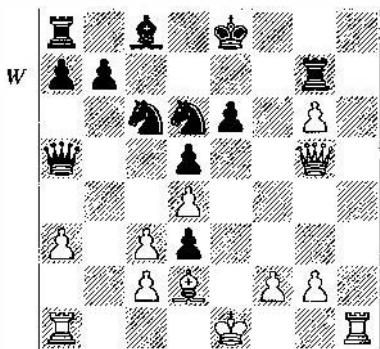


I was sceptical, but after being mated a few times in the analysis, I soon gave up and went off to the bar, to drown my sorrows with a few bottles of shockingly over-priced Norwegian beer.

However, by this time I was in my 'Russian period', and rather than abandon the whole opening as a forced loss (which would probably have been my reaction a few years earlier!), I duly spent a few of those cold Moscow winter evenings having a closer look at the whole 16 h4 line. I soon came to the conclusion that Ernst's proposed piece sacrifice was unsound, and that 16... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ was a good answer to his new move.

As luck would have it, some four months later, at the next Gausdal tournament, the first round draw threw up the pairing Ernst-Giddins. Rather than

doing what I would have done in the 'bad old days', and hastily improvising a new defence to 1 e4, I instead chose to call Ernst's bluff. It was clear to me that he would not play the piece sacrifice, but even so, I wanted to see what he would do instead. After just a couple of minutes' play, the position after 16 h4 was on the board, and I uncorked 16... $\mathbb{Q}d6$. To my astonishment, after only a few minutes' thought, Ernst confidently rattled out 17 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 18 h5 h6 19 hxg6. However, after the further moves 19...hxg5 20 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ (D) the 'Hit-man' began to consume vast quantities of time, as he realized that the attack was not succeeding.



After 23 $\mathbb{Q}h8+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}h7$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 26 g7 $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ 28 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xc2$ b6 it was clear that Black had succeeded in shielding himself on the ropes and warding off all White's best punches, and even I was able to wrap up the game with the extra piece. A triumph of preparation, certainly, but also a

triumph of faith in one's opening, despite having suffered a bad defeat.

As a final footnote to this episode, I should point out that the wonderful magnum opus *Französisch Winawer, Band 1* by Kindermann and Dirr, published in 2001, mentions 16 h4 as an interesting but untried move; evidently, my 'Rumbles in the Jungle' with the Hit-man have not reached most databases! To some extent, however, the theoretical significance of the line is not so great, since 14... $\mathbb{Q}c7$! is nowadays regarded as superior to my 14...c4.

Playing for Results

Another reason (read 'excuse') players give for departing from their normal repertoire is that they were deliberately playing for a certain result, and wanted to choose an appropriate opening. For example, a player needs to win with Black, in order to win the tournament or fulfil a title norm. Concerned that his opponent might play for a draw, he abandons his normal French Defence, fearing the Exchange Variation, and instead plays the Sicilian, which he has never played before. Alternatively, a normally sharp attacking player only needs a draw from a certain game. Instead of playing his normal game, he adopts some kind of quiet set-up, hoping to avoid risk. In both cases, the result can easily be disaster.

Even at GM level, there have been many classic examples of players falling into this trap. One of the most

dramatic in recent years occurred in the final round of the 1990 Interzonal in Manila. Going into the final round, Mikhail Gurevich was on +3, a point off the lead. Having led for most of the tournament, his tie-break was such that a draw with White against Short in the final round would put the Russian GM into the Candidates cycle. Short, on the other hand, had a poor tie-break, and needed to win if he were to reach the Candidates. The game opened thus:

M. Gurevich – Short
Manila 1Z 1990

1 d4 e6 2 e4?

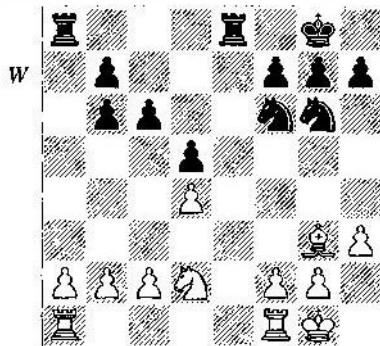
The question mark is not so much due to my reverence for the French, but instead reflects a very bad psychological decision by Gurevich. A confirmed 1 d4 player, whose theoretical knowledge was (and still is) one of his greatest strengths, he would in any other circumstances have played 2 c4, and taken on a main-line queen's pawn opening. Knowing that he needs only a draw, he allows temptation to overtake him, and instead heads for an Exchange French. His position never recovers.

2...d5 3 exd5 exd5 4 ♜f3 ♜g4 5 h3 ♜h5 6 ♜c2 ♜d6 7 ♜e5?!

Another move he would probably not have played in normal circumstances. Although objectively, Black has no more than a rather dead equality, the psychological initiative is already with him.

7...♜xe2 8 ♜xe2 ♜e7 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♜f4 ♜e8 11 ♜g4 ♜xe5 12 ♜xe5 ♜g6

13 ♜g3 ♜d7 14 ♜d2 ♜f6 15 ♜f3 c6 16 ♜b3 ♜b6 17 ♜xb6 axb6 (D)



The endgame offers Black an edge. Although White's bishop cannot be described as 'bad' in the conventional sense, it is actually less effective than Black's knight, despite the relatively open position. In addition, the half-open a-file means that White must constantly worry about a black pawn advance ...b5-b4, breaking in down the a-file. Although White's position is objectively tenable, Black's enduring pressure means that it is highly unpleasant to play in practice, and a dispirited Gurevich is slowly pushed off the board. The remaining moves must have been agony for him.

18 a3 ♜e4 19 ♜xe4 ♜xe4 20 ♜fd1 b5 21 ♜f1 f6 22 f3 ♜e6 23 ♜el ♜f7 24 ♜xe6 ♜xe6 25 ♜el+ ♜d7 26 ♜e2 h5 27 ♜d3 h4 28 ♜h2 ♜e7 29 ♜f4 ♜f5 30 ♜d2 b6 31 ♜e2 c5 32 ♜e3 b4 33 axb4 c4+ 34 ♜c3 ♜d6 35 ♜el ♜a4 36 ♜d2 ♜xb4 37 ♜a1 ♜xb2 38 ♜a7+ ♜e6 39 ♜xg7 b5 40 ♜f2 b4 41 ♜c1 c3 42 ♜xh4 ♜f5 0-1

Gurevich's misfortune had remarkable consequences for the chess world. As a result of this game, Short reached the Candidates, went on to win it, and then participated in the breakaway from FIDE, which has resulted in today's shambolic world championship situation. Just think, if Gurevich had played 2 c4, we might still have a worthwhile world championship cycle!

The late Soviet grandmaster Lev Polugaevsky provided some highly instructive advice on how to approach the opening phase in a decisive game. Once again, the scene was the last round of an Interzonal tournament, this time at Petropolis, Brazil, in 1973. In order to have any chance of making the Candidates, Polugaevsky needed to beat Portisch with White. The man himself now takes up the story of the discussion with his second (Bagirov), and his eventual decision:

First I had to decide the question: should I play that which I normally play, or should I try to surprise my opponent with my choice of opening? ... we began considering opening with 1 e4. In its favour, apart from its surprise value, was the fact that after 1 e4, Portisch feels much less confident...

"But if it should be a Lopez, what then?" I asked dubiously.

"Play the Italian Game!"

"But I never played it, even as a child!"

"So much the better! Portisch only plays the variation with ... ♜c5."

And I was shown a multitude of variations of primordial antiquity, which

had been worked out taking Portisch's games into account.

I was ready to agree, when suddenly I sensed: this is no way to play! This is not the way to plan a decisive battle. After all, if I were to fail to gain an advantage from the opening, I would never forgive myself for having betrayed 'my sort' of chess, and this would inevitably tell on my condition during the game.

(Grandmaster Preparation, p. 194)

Instead, Polugaevsky opened 1 ♜f3, secured an advantage from the opening, and went on to win a fine technical game, in his best style.

On this same theme, I recall an interesting exchange with my trainer, when I was in Moscow. Facing a game where a win with Black would put me in the prize list of a tournament, I made the classic mistake of playing a dubious gambit that I had not played before. I emerged from the opening with a bad position, and was lucky to draw. Back in Moscow, Igor quizzed me about my choice of opening, and I explained my reasoning. "Ah", he replied. "So in other words, you think it will be easier to beat someone from a rotten position you know nothing about, than from a decent one that you've played umpteen times before?" (he then went on to add that "every Russian schoolboy knows better...", but you'd probably guessed that bit anyway...).

There is one other factor which makes it dangerous to switch openings in a crucial game. I have repeatedly emphasized in this book that

understanding the typical middlegame structures that an opening leads to is the single most important factor in playing an opening successfully. If you adopt an opening you have rarely played before, you are almost inevitably going to finish up in a position you are not familiar with. Even if your position is objectively good, your lack of familiarity with the structure is probably going to detract from your ability to play it properly. This phenomenon was illustrated very nicely in the 10th and final game of the Short-Karpov Candidates Semi-Final match in 1992.

Going into this crucial game, Karpov trailed 5-4, and thus had to win with Black in order to save the match and force a tie-break. It is difficult for any player to win with Black to order against a world-class opponent, but for Karpov it is even more so, since his normal opening repertoire is not very well suited to the task. Karpov has always believed in playing primarily for solid equality with Black, rather than doing anything very ambitious. His normal responses to 1 e4 were 1...c6 and 1...e5. However, in the match with Short, these lines had brought him nothing but trouble – from two games with each, he had amassed a grand total of just half a point. Faced with a must-win situation in the final game, it was not so surprising that he chose to switch to the Sicilian, even though he has played the opening on only very few occasions in his career, and then usually against significantly weaker players.

Short – Karpov

Linares Ct (10) 1992

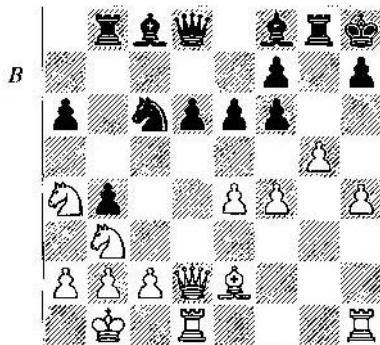
1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3!$

The exclamation mark is not for the objective merits of White's second move, but for an excellent psychological decision. Needing only a draw, there must have been a great temptation on Short's part to adopt a quiet line, such as 2 c3. However, at that time in his career, Short had rarely played such lines since his youth, and instead always took on the main lines of the Sicilian (with great success, it should be added). Rather than back down now, Short avoids the mistake that Gurevich had made against him (see above) and sticks to his usual approach.

2... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d6 6 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ e6 7 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 8 0-0-0 0-0 9 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ a6 10 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ gxf6 11 h4 $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 12 g4 b5 13 g5 b4

The first new move, 13... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ having been played previously.

14 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 15 f4 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ (D)



Looking at the position objectively, it is clear that Karpov has achieved all that he could reasonably have wished for. In a must-win situation as Black, he has reached an extremely sharp and unbalanced position, in which Black's chances are reasonable. However, the problem he faces is that while the position may objectively be OK for Black, it is of a type that Karpov had hardly ever played in his life before, and in which he must have felt like a fish out of water. The effect of this showed in his next move.

17...e5?!

This act of larceny betrays Karpov's lack of experience on the black side of the Sicilian, and the move caused uproar amongst the watching GMs in the Press Room. In particular, the excitable Ljubojević went quite berserk, exclaiming to all and sundry "Karpov may understand chess, but he does not understand the Sicilian Defence!" The extent of Ljubo's criticism may be somewhat exaggerated, but there is no denying that 17...e5 is a poor move, after which White stands clearly better. Short instead recommended 17... $\mathbb{W}c7$.

18 f5 $\mathbb{W}xg5$ 19 hxg5 $\mathbb{W}xg5$

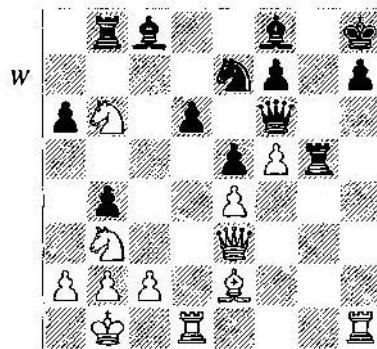
19... $\mathbb{W}xg5$ is no better in view of 20 $\mathbb{W}d5$.

20 $\mathbb{W}c3$ $\mathbb{W}f6$

Karpov subsequently suggested the alternative 20...h6, but Short counters with 21 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}a5$. It is clear from this and similar variations that Black's 17th move has allowed the white minor pieces to become very active, while in this position

Black's extra pawn is of little relevance.

21 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ (D)



In this position, Short now regained his pawn with 22 $\mathbb{Q}xc8?$, but instead the immediate 22 $\mathbb{Q}xa6!$ would have been virtually winning for White. After a subsequent further error by Short, Black obtained serious counterplay, and only went down in a dramatic time-scramble.

This tense and dramatic game illustrates two things. Firstly, the problem faced by a player who switches to an opening with which he is unfamiliar. However good his specific preparation, and however objectively reasonable the position he obtains, he is likely to find himself playing a position and structure in which he has little or no experience. In such a case, even as great a player as Karpov can find it difficult to handle the position well. The second thing the game illustrates is the rewards which can come from being courageous when needing only a draw, and not being afraid to risk it.

one's normal lines and accept a sharp position. Short's play in this game is an excellent example of this.

Heading for the Divorce Courts

Thus far in this chapter, we have considered merely temporary departures from one's repertoire, in a one-off game. I now want to consider the more fundamental decision to change one's repertoire on a permanent basis, and to abandon a particular opening or variation for good.

As you will have gathered from the foregoing chapters of this book, I am in general quite hostile to the idea of changing one's opening repertoire in a fundamental way. Just as in other walks of life, divorce can be a messy and expensive business, and in my opinion, it is rarely justified in the context of chess openings. The main cause of my hostility is the impact that changing openings has on one's understanding of an opening.

I have repeatedly stressed throughout this book that understanding typical positions is the single most important factor in successful use of an opening. Such understanding is first and foremost the product of experience, and must be built up over a period of years, by playing and analysing the opening. It follows from this that by changing openings completely, one is abandoning the experience and understanding that one has built up in the line concerned, and thereby putting oneself

back to square one in this respect. In the great majority of cases, the change will backfire.

I know a player in England who is a particularly drastic example of the effects of this constant switching of openings. The player concerned, rated around 2000, was a friend of mine in the 1990s. In the 8 years or so that we were playing tournaments together, his white opening repertoire changed five times. He started off playing 1 e4 (Bishop's Opening and 2 f4 Sicilian). After a couple of tournaments in which his results with these openings were disappointing, he switched to the Colle System. One year on, he decided that this was too quiet, and that the path to triumph lay in going back to 1 e4, only this time taking on main-line Sicilians. After six months of sitting up until 4 a.m. each morning, studying Nunn's *Beating the Sicilian*, he played one international open, scored 0/3 on the white side of the Sicilian, and decided that he should instead play Torre systems (1 d4, 2 ♜f3 and 3 ♜g5). A couple of years later, it was the English Opening with 2 g3 that became the secret of all success. Not surprisingly, over the period he scored about 30% with White, and even that owed much to his tenacity in defending lost opening causes. Yet, over the same period, as Black he never varied from the French against 1 e4 and the Slav against 1 d4, and his score as Black averaged close to 70%! The moral of the story could scarcely be clearer.

At a much higher level, the top Russian GM Dreev underwent a similarly

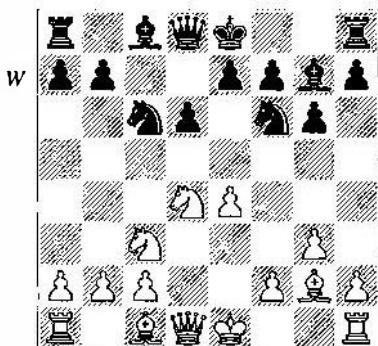
painful transitional ordeal in the mid-1990s. For most of his adult chess career, Dreev stuck faithfully to the French Defence, playing lines with 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ and 3 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ c5 4 exd5 $\mathbb{W}xd5$. In general, his results were extremely successful, but somewhere around 1997, he became dissatisfied with the French (in particular, the 4... $\mathbb{W}xd5$ Tarrasch line came under serious theoretical pressure) and began to look for another defence to 1 e4. At first, he chose the Classical Sicilian, but it was very clear that he was like a fish out of water in such positions. A few brief examples will demonstrate this:

Adams – Dreev

Linares 1997

1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d6 6 g3 g6 7 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7??$ (D)

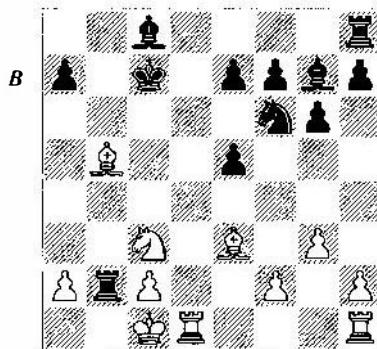
Already a significant inaccuracy. Correct is 7... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$.



8 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 9 e5 dxe5 10 $\mathbb{W}xd8+!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2?$

After this further mistake, his position is critical.

13 0-0-0+ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}b5!$ (D)



14... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 15 a3 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xb5+$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xa7$

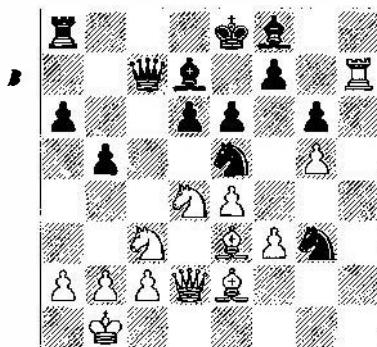
Black is an exchange down for no adequate compensation. Dreev duly lost the ending.

Anand – Dreev

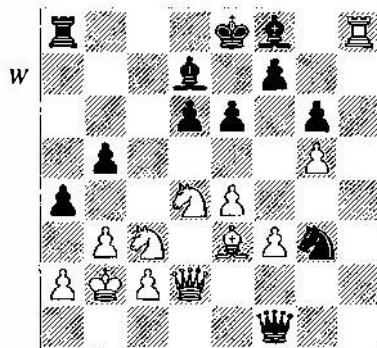
Linares 1997

1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d6 6 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ e6 7 $\mathbb{W}d2$ a6 8 0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 9 f3 h6 10 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 11 g4 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 12 b4 b5 13 $\mathbb{Q}e2??$ g6 14 g5 hxg5 15 hxg5 $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}h7$ (D)

Thus far, Dreev has played OK and has a satisfactory position, but now his lack of experience in Sicilian positions comes back to haunt him. Instead of playing 18... $\mathbb{Q}xe2$, which promises balanced chances, he makes two serious errors in quick succession, and loses in just eight more moves:



18... $\mathbb{Q}c4?$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 20 $b3$ $\mathbb{Q}f1+?$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ a5 22 $\mathbb{Q}h8$ a4 (D)



23 $\mathbb{Q}dxb5!$ $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ axb3
25 $\mathbb{Q}xd6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ 1-0

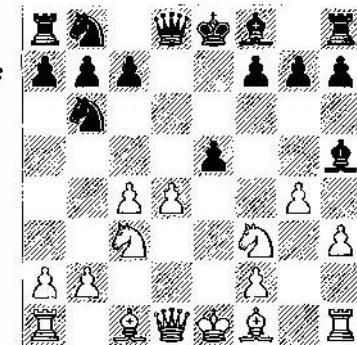
Svidler – Dreev
Russian Ch (Elista) 1997

I e4 d5

After his torrid time with the Sicilian at Linares (in addition to the above games, he also lost heavily to Judit Polgar), Dreev decides to try something else, but coming from a player of

his style, this move smacks of desperation.

2 exd5 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 4 d4 $\mathbb{Q}g4$
5 h3 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 6 c4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ e5 8 g4 (D)



Already Black is in trouble. Playing with great elan, Svidler smashes through rapidly:

8... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ c6
11 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 12 f4 h6 13 f5 $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 14 c5!
 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 15 g5!! 0-0 16 g6! $\mathbb{Q}fxg6$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}e6$
 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5+$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$
20 $\mathbb{Q}fxg6$ $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}xh6!!$

Black's position is quite lost. Fine play by Svidler, but Black scarcely resembled a world-class GM.

After these and several other similar disasters, Dreev finally settled on the Caro-Kann with 4... $\mathbb{Q}f5$. This proved to be the sort of solid and sound defence which suited his technical style, and he soon regained his solidity against 1 e4, something he retains to this day. Nonetheless, his experiences during the period when he was trying to change openings are a salutary lesson; if such a thing can

happen to a world-class GM, it can happen to any of us.

So, are there any circumstances when a change of opening repertoire can be justified? Despite my previous strictures, I believe that there are, although these cases are relatively rare. Essentially, they boil down to two main situations.

Bagirov's Law

The first situation is when one's confidence in an opening has been so severely undermined that it is having a negative effect on one's play. In the Introduction, I described the way I used to blame the opening for all of my defeats, before I began studying chess properly and developed a cohesive repertoire. Having no proper opening repertoire, and constantly playing lines which were objectively dubious and about which I knew very little, had an extremely negative effect on my psychological state during a game. Whenever I fell into a bad position, I had a strong tendency to cave in psychologically, just saying to myself something like "Oh heck, what's the point of trying to defend this stupid position; it's all the opening's fault". Such a feeling makes it extremely difficult to motivate oneself to mount a successful defence in bad positions, and it is notable that I hardly ever succeeded in doing so. One thing I noticed after I began playing proper openings was that I found it much easier to cope with bad positions. If the opening did go wrong, I found that my

attitude was altogether different – "This position is not the fault of the opening – I'm the one who has misplayed it, and it's up to me to fight my way out of trouble". The result was that I started to defend significantly more tenaciously than I had ever been able to do previously.

This experience reminded me of a story from the world of professional snooker. Some years ago, a multiple world champion described the psychological effect on his play of breaking his cue. Like most snooker players, he had used the same cue throughout his professional career, only to have it broken beyond repair one day. The new two-piece high-tech cue he started using was objectively in better condition than the 30-year old, slightly warped, one-piece wooden one he had used all his life, yet he was completely unable to get used to it, and his play collapsed. When asked what the difference was between the two cues, he replied "With my old cue, if I missed a straightforward pot, it was my fault; now if I miss one, it's the cue's fault".

Such psychological problems are one reason why it may be right to change your opening repertoire. If you suffer so many defeats that you lose confidence in the opening, the negative associations are liable to haunt you whenever you play the line, and in this case, the only solution may be to abandon the opening. In this context, I had an interesting conversation in 2001 with the Latvian GM Igors Rausis. He told me that the late Grandmaster Bagirov (who became a Latvian citizen in

his later years, and lived in Riga) used to say that if you lose three games in a row in the same opening, you should give it up, even if it's your favourite opening, because of the negative emotions associated with repeated defeats! At the risk of incurring the wrath of my editor, I have to say that I personally find it hard to believe that a man who played Alekhine's Defence virtually all his life never lost three successive games with it, but there you are! Seriously, though, Bagirov's basic point is well made – if your confidence in an opening goes irretrievably (whether after three consecutive losses or not), it can sometimes be best to abandon it, if only temporarily.

Refutations

The other main circumstance where a change of opening is justified is if the line you play has been refuted. In such a case, you have little choice but to abandon the line and take up something else, especially given the extent to which theoretical knowledge now travels. If you stick to your old line in the hope that none of your opponents will know the refutation, you are taking a considerable risk, and will be found out increasingly often as time goes on, thanks to the ever-growing use of computer databases.

Having said that, the risk of a line being refuted or rendered effectively unplayable is very small, unless you are playing dubious and offbeat lines. If you play some kind of respectable main-line opening, it is in practice

never likely to be refuted. There may be a theoretical development which seems to put the line under pressure, but as we discussed earlier in the book, such developments tend to be of temporary effect, and sooner or later an improvement will be found which rehabilitates the line. In the meantime, you may be able to avoid the problem by varying your move-order, or adopting a slightly different line within the same opening. It is unlikely that you will ever need to abandon your opening entirely.

Dodging the Issue

The last comment leads on to the subject of precisely **how** to change your repertoire, if you feel that you need to. The main advice here is to try to avoid changes which are too radical. As I discussed earlier under the topic of playing main lines rather than sidelines, the great merit of most respectable main line openings is that they offer flexibility, and this can be of great use if you need to amend your repertoire. If your Sicilian Dragon is under pressure and you feel the need to change, you do not have to abandon the Sicilian entirely. Instead, you can switch perhaps to the Accelerated Dragon, thereby obtaining positions similar to those you are used to playing, but avoiding the specific variation you are worried about. Similarly, if you lose confidence in defending the 4... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ Caro Kann, you can consider switching to 4... $\mathbb{A}f5$ lines. Such a change enables you still to exploit your knowledge

and experience of Caro-Kann positions in general, and White's various alternatives on moves 2 and 3, whereas abandoning the whole opening and taking up (say) the Pirc Defence would involve learning a whole raft of brand new lines and structures.

Conclusions

1) In general, it is highly risky to depart from your usual opening repertoire in a particular game. It may be tempting to do so to avoid a certain variation, or to exploit a perceived gap in the opponent's repertoire, but the risks associated with playing an unfamiliar type of position are generally likely to outweigh the benefits. Unless you really believe there is a good chance to catch the opponent in a variation which leads to almost forced loss, you are probably better off sticking to your usual lines.

2) The above advice is especially important in cases where you need a certain result (i.e. a draw is enough to win a tournament or fulfil a norm). Many games have been lost by players who needed only a draw, and were

tempted to play for that result straight from the opening. The best way to secure half a point is to obtain a large or even decisive advantage, and then offer your draw from a position of strength. You are far more likely to do that if you play something you know and understand, rather than something you are unfamiliar with.

3) Remember Belov's words – it is easier to win from an equal position that you have played before, than from a bad one you know nothing about!

4) Be very careful about making wholesale changes to your repertoire. Bear in mind that all openings have their problems, and giving up your regular opening because of one variation you dislike is a very committal decision. The work involved in learning and mastering a whole new opening is much greater than that in improving your understanding of your existing lines.

5) If you really feel the need to alter your repertoire, consider whether a small change in variations and/or move-order will enable you to avoid what you are unhappy about, without a wholesale change of opening.

9 Some Players' Repertoires Analysed

This final chapter consists of an examination of the opening repertoires of a set of grandmasters, from Fischer and Kasparov downwards. The idea is to see how leading GMs deal with the various issues we have discussed earlier in the book. In addition, you may be able to draw on some of these examples in modelling your own repertoire. Indeed, one effective way of forming a repertoire is simply to lift most of it from a leading player, whose style you feel is close to your own. By following that player's games, you will be assured of a regular flow of fresh information on the lines concerned, and will be able to follow how his repertoire evolves over time.

Bobby Fischer

White: 1 e4 – Ruy Lopez, main-line Open Sicilians, 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ vs the French, etc.

Black 1 e4: Najdorf Sicilian

Black 1 d4: King's Indian, with the occasional Grünfeld

The outstanding feature of Fischer's repertoire was that it tended to be very narrow. As discussed above, this was true of most top players of his

generation, but Fischer was perhaps even more focused than most of his contemporaries. Another point I made earlier in the book is that players with narrow repertoires tend often to be the sort who believe very strongly in the correctness of their own ideas, and are willing to defend them through thick and thin. Fischer was certainly that sort of stubborn character, and his repertoire bears that out. Apart from a small handful of 1 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ games in his youth, and a similarly small number of games with 1 b3 and 1 c4 during 1970-2, he scarcely ever opened with anything other than 1 e4, and was on record in *My 60 Memorable Games* as describing it as "best by test". Like almost all top-level 1 c4 players, the main-line Lopez was his chief weapon against 1...e5, and the Open Sicilian against 1...c5.

One particular Fischer favourite, right from his earliest youth, was the Sozin Attack (6 $\mathbb{Q}c4$) in the Sicilian, which he used almost exclusively against both the Classical (1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}c4$) and Najdorf (1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a6 6 $\mathbb{Q}c4$). The following is typical of Fischer's use of the line:

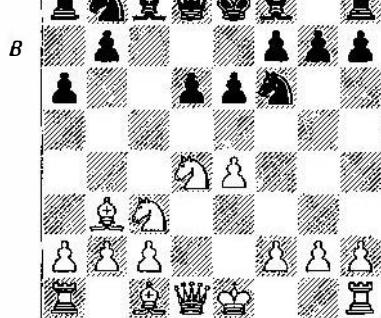
Fischer – Rubinetti*Palma de Mallorca IZ 1970*

1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$
 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a6

The game Fischer-Olafsson, Stockholm IZ 1962 was an example of Fischer's successful use of the same set-up against the Classical Sicilian: 5... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ e6 7 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 8 f4 0-0 9 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ b5 11 c5 dxe5 12 fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 13 0-0 b4 14 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 16 cxd6 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 19 axb3 e5 20 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ a5 21 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ exd4 22 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}fd8$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ and White won the ending.

6 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ e6 7 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ (D)

One of the earliest Fischer wins in this line went 7 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}d7$? 8 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 0-0 10 f4 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 11 g4! $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 13 f5 e5 14 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ with a crushing advantage, Fischer-Witte, US Open 1957.

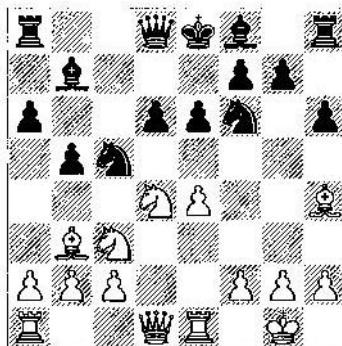


7...b5 8 0-0

The famous encounter Fischer-Tal, Bled/Zagreb/Belgrade Ct 1959 saw 8

f4. That game continued 8...b4?! 9 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 10 0-0 g6 11 f5! $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ and now 14 $\mathbb{Q}e3$! would have given White a vicious attack.

8... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ h6 11 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$? (D)



12 $\mathbb{Q}d5!$ exd5 13 exd5+ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 14 b4 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ bxa4 16 c4 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ g5 19 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 20 c5! dxc5 21 bxc5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$?! 22 $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}a4+$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 1-0

Against the French, Fischer generally stuck to 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$, preferring the positional a4-based lines against the Winawer (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 4 e5 c5 5 a3 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ + 6 bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 7 a4). Indeed, in *My 60 Memorable Games*, he declared that he doubted the Winawer's soundness, but he also admitted that his results had not been encouraging. In fact, it was not until the opening game of his 1971 Candidates match against Larsen that Fischer produced a really convincing demonstration against the Winawer. In his youth

he had similar problems against the Caro-Kann, although these vanished once he finally abandoned the Two Knights Variation (1 e4 c6 2 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d5 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$).

Another early favourite of Fischer's, for which he retained a penchant throughout his career, was the King's Indian Attack. In his early youth, before deciding that 1 e4 was best by test, he frequently opened 1 $\mathbb{Q}f3$, 2 g3, etc. Although he soon abandoned this, he continued to use the King's Indian Attack as an occasional weapon in positions where Black had committed himself to the move ...e6, i.e. 2 d3 against the French, and 3 d3 against 1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6. A typical example was the following:

Fischer – Panno
Buenos Aires 1970

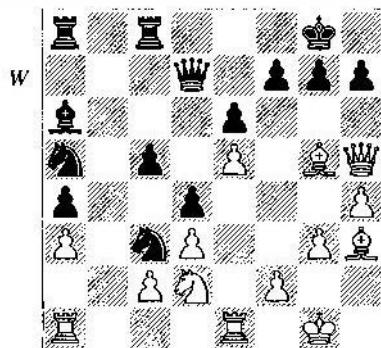
1 e4 c5

A celebrated French Defence example was Fischer-Miagmarsuren, Sousse 1970: 1...e6 2 d3 d5 3 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4 g3 c5 5 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}gf3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 7 0-0 0-0 8 e5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ b5 10 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ b4 11 h4 a5 12 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ a4 13 a3! bxa3 14 bxa3 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ d4 17 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}fc8$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c3$ (D).

23 $\mathbb{Q}f6$! $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ g6 25 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ c4 27 h5 cxd3 28 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ dxc2 30 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}xh7+$! 1-0.

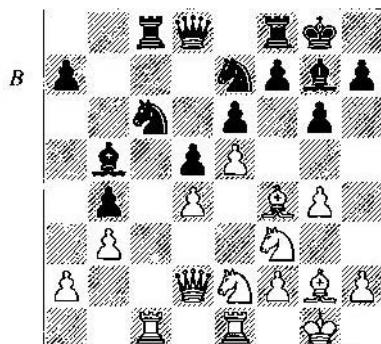
2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3 d3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 4 g3 g6

Black chose a different set-up in Fischer-Ivkov, Santa Monica 1966:



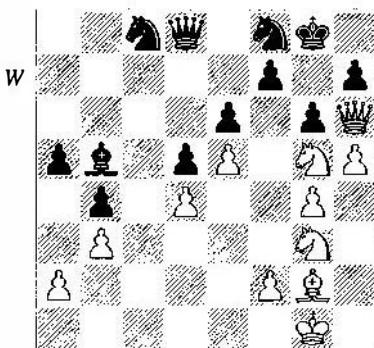
4...d5 5 $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ 7 0-0 0-0 8 $\mathbb{Q}h4$! b6? 9 f4 dxe4 10 dxe4 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ c4 12 c3 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 13 c5 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ + 14 $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 17 g4! $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ g6 19 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 20 f5 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 21 fxg6 fxg6 22 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$! with a decisive advantage.

5 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 6 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ d6 8 c3 0-0 9 d4 cxd4 10 cxd4 d5 11 e5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ b5 15 b3 b4 16 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}ac6$ 18 g4! (D)



18...a5 19 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 20 h4 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}xc1$

$\mathbb{Q}xh6$ 24 $\mathbb{W}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 25 $\mathbb{Q}xc8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 26 $h5$ $\mathbb{W}d8?$ 27 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ (D)



28 $\mathbb{Q}e4!$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}xh7!$ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 30 $hxg6$ $fxg6$ 31 $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 32 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}f3+$ 33 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}h4+$ 34 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ 35 $\mathbb{Q}f6+!$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 36 $\mathbb{W}h7+$ 1-0

As Black, Fischer displayed similar faith in his chosen lines, sticking with almost religious fervour to his Najdorf and King's Indian. His Grünfeld usage was particularly directed against Spassky in their early encounters, and probably resulted from the fact that the latter usually adopted the Sämisch Variation against the King's Indian (1 $d4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 $c4$ $g6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 4 $e4$ $d6$ 5 $f3$).

In the course of his career, Fischer lost a number of games against the Sämisch, and generally seemed to feel somewhat uncomfortable against it. However, he also lost both Grünfeld games against Spassky (although neither loss can be attributed to the opening) and it is significant that when it came to the 1972 world championship

match against the same opponent, Fischer adopted the Nimzo-Indian, Semi-Tarrasch and Modern Benoni against Spassky's 1 $d4$.

World champions naturally tend to have a major impact on setting trends in openings, and Fischer was certainly no exception. It was his patronage of the Najdorf Sicilian which really put that variation on the map, and it was already the most popular of all Sicilian variations by the time Kasparov took it up. Another Fischer favourite, the Exchange Lopez (1 $e4$ $e5$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $a6$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $dxcc6$), has retained a fair deal of popularity to this day. It had scarcely been played at all since Lasker's time, until Fischer reintroduced it with such effect at the Havana Olympiad in 1966 (Fischer's particular contribution being the follow-up 5 $0-0$, instead of Lasker's preferences 5 $d4$ and 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$).

Garry Kasparov

White: 1 $e4$, 1 $d4$, 1 $c4$

Black 1 $e4$: Najdorf Sicilian

Black 1 $d4$: Grünfeld, plus occasional Nimzo, QGA, QGD

Kasparov is without doubt the best-prepared player the world has ever seen, and the depth of his preparation has brought about a very clear rise in the overall standard of preparation at all levels of the game. What I find most interesting about Kasparov's repertoire is that he combines the two main approaches we discussed earlier in Chapter 2. As White, he tends to

have a very wide repertoire, regularly using all three main opening moves, in search of an opening advantage. As Black, however, he tends to be very much more limited, for example, sticking almost exclusively to the Najdorf against 1 e4. I believe this reflects the fact that Kasparov plays almost all of his chess in super-tournaments, and rarely plays against players who are more than one class below him. Consequently, he prefers to rely on one sharp, ambitious opening rather than dabbling in several. With White, however, he is striving the whole time to benefit from the element of surprise, and this generally means being prepared to vary one's openings much more.

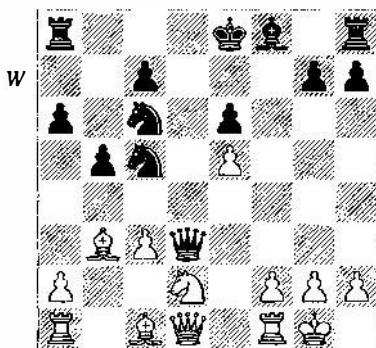
Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Kasparov's repertoire development in recent years has been as Black against 1 d4. Up until 1997, the King's Indian had been his favourite defence ever since his youth (except for the years 1983-7), with the Grünfeld and the occasional QGD as an alternative. However, after several King's Indian losses against Kramnik, particularly in the so-called Bayonet line (1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 g6 3 $\mathbb{A}c3$ $\mathbb{A}g7$ 4 e4 d6 5 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 0-0 $\mathbb{A}e2$ e5 7 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 8 d5 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9 b4), he has abandoned the opening altogether, as indeed have most other top-level KID practitioners (Polgar, Shirov, Gelfand, Van Wely, etc.). From 1997 until his world championship match against Kramnik in 2000, he stuck pretty consistently to the Grünfeld, but after losing game 2 of that match, he started scratching around with other openings,

mainly the QGA, Nimzo-Indian and 4...a6 Slav. At the time of writing, he continues to vary his approach against 1 d4, but he seems to have decided that the Grünfeld is not really solid enough against some the leading members of what he rather contemptuously refers to as "the Pepsi generation".

Against 1 e4, Kasparov's advocacy of the Najdorf has been almost total, since abandoning the Caro-Kann in his youth. However, he has on one or two occasions shown how psychologically effective an unexpected switch can be, most notably when he surprised Anand with the Dragon during their 1995 world championship match. At the time of writing, he has begun using the Sveshnikov Sicilian more regularly, most notably surprising Shirov with it in the last round of Linares 2002, to notch up yet another one-sided victory against his favourite customer.

The most stunning quality of Kasparov's opening repertoire is his ability to produce innovations that are not merely small improvements on what has gone before, but which completely overturn existing opening theory. There are many examples of this in his games, one notable case being the line 1 e4 e5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{A}c6$ 3 $\mathbb{A}b5$ a6 1 $\mathbb{A}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 6 d4 b5 7 $\mathbb{A}b3$ d5 8 dxе5 $\mathbb{A}e6$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 10 c3 d1 11 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ dxс3 12 $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxе6 13 bxс3 $\mathbb{W}d3$ (D).

This had been considered satisfactory for Black ever since its first appearance in Karpov-Korchnoi, Baguio City Weh (10) 1978. However, when

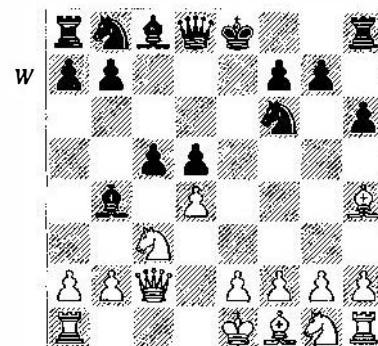


Anand was unwise enough to repeat the line in game 10 of his 1995 match with Kasparov, the latter uncorked 14 $\mathbb{Q}c2!$ $\mathbb{W}xc3$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}b3!$, offering a rook for the attack. The idea itself was not totally new, with 14 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ having been casually suggested by Tal in notes to the Karpov-Korchnoi game. However, nobody had played it or analysed it seriously until Kasparov came along and demonstrated to Anand that it wins by force. Nobody has played 11...dxc3 at top level ever since.

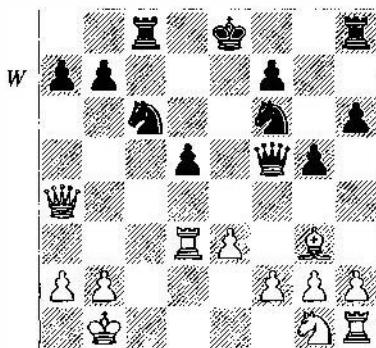
In addition to refuting entire opening lines, Kasparov is also responsible for turning several previously neglected openings into serious propositions at top GM level. One such is the Scotch, which he first used against Karpov in game 14 of the final match in New York/Lyons in 1990. Thanks to Kasparov's patronage, the Scotch has achieved widespread popularity and now rivals the Lopcz as White's main try for advantage after 1 e4 e5.

Another line which Kasparov is almost single-handedly responsible for making into a major weapon is 4 $\mathbb{W}c2$

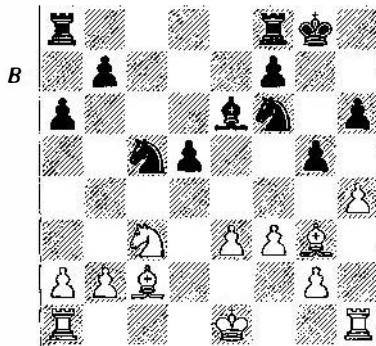
against the Nimzo-Indian. Apart from a few games by Seirawan, no top GM had regarded this as a really serious try for advantage, until Kasparov started using it in the late 1980s. It soon became overwhelmingly the most popular reply to the Nimzo, and remains so to this today. One of the bedrocks of Kasparov's revival of the line was the variation 1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 e6 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 4 $\mathbb{W}c2$ d5 5 cxd5 exd5 6 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ h6 7 $\mathbb{Q}h4c5$ (D).



Until Kasparov got to work on it, this had been regarded as fine for Black for almost half a century, ever since the game Keres-Botvinnik, USSR Absolute Ch (Leningrad/Moscow) 1941, which had famously ended in a 22-move debacle for White: 8 0-0-0? $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 9 $\mathbb{W}xc3$ g5 10 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ cxd4 11 $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 12 $\mathbb{W}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 13 e3 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ (it is already clear that the white king is caught in a lethal crossfire) 14 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3+$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{W}f5$ (D) 17 e4 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}al$ 0-0 19 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ b5 20 $\mathbb{W}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 21 $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c2+$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 0-1.

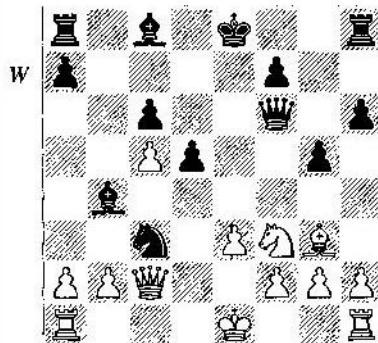


However, Kasparov's extensive and never-ending analytical work produced the major improvement 8 dxc5!, which completely overturned the theoretical verdict on 4...d5. The first time he used the move was in Kasparov-Korchnoi, Tilburg 1989. Korchnoi reacted badly with 8...0-0?! and stood clearly worse after 9 e3 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3+$ 12 $\mathbb{W}xc3$ $\mathbb{W}xc3+$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ g5 15 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 16 f3 a6 17 h4 (D) (1-0, 27).



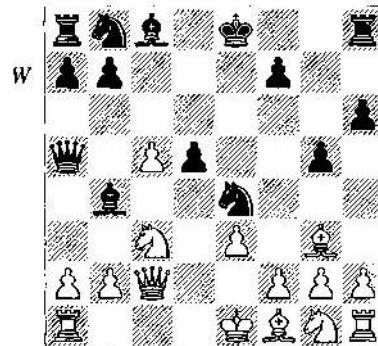
A year later at Linares, Spassky attempted to improve with 8... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ but

fared little better: 9 e3 g5 10 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}xc6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ (D).



14 a3 g4 15 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ 16 $\mathbb{A}xb4$ $\mathbb{W}f5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ $\mathbb{gxf3}$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}g4?$ 19 $\mathbb{W}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 21 $\mathbb{W}e5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 22 $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{W}g6$ 23 $\mathbb{W}xf3$ f6 24 $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 25 f3 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 26 $\mathbb{Q}d2!$ $\mathbb{W}f5$ 27 h4 $\mathbb{W}xf4$ 28 $\mathbb{exf4}$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 29 g4 1-0.

Finally, Nigel Short made his attempt to strengthen Black's play in his world championship match against Kasparov in 1993: 8...g5 9 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 10 e3 $\mathbb{W}a5$ (D).



This all-out attack on the pinned c3-knight was the basis of Short's new idea. On its initial outing, in the fifth game, the idea secured a comfortable draw, but when Short was unwise enough to repeat the line four games later, he walked into another powerful piece of Kasparov preparation, in the shape of 11 $\mathbb{Q}c2!$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}c5!$ 0-0 13 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}g6?$ (NCO gives 13... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ with a slight advantage to White) 14 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xc3!$ White was much better and went on to win.

Anatoly Karpov

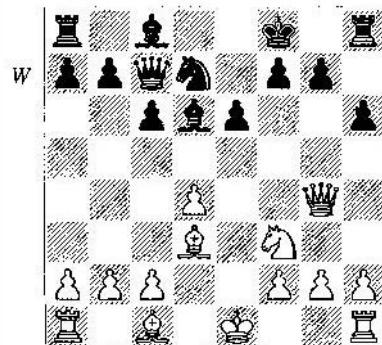
White: 1 d4

Black 1 e4: Caro-Kann with 4... $\mathbb{Q}d7$

Black 1 d4: Nimzo and Queen's Indian

Karpov is a leading example of a player who has always had a narrow repertoire. In addition, his approach is unlike that of both Fischer and Kasparov, both of whom tend to believe in active counterplay with the black pieces. Karpov is much closer to the more classical 'win with White, draw with Black' approach, and throughout his career he has generally concentrated on solid equalization as his first priority with the black pieces. Against 1 d4, he has played the Nimzo and Queen's Indian almost exclusively since his earliest youth, varying only with the occasional QGD, Tartakower Variation (1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{h}6$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 0-0 7 e3 b6). During most of his world

championship years, he generally met 1 e4 with 1... e5, initially playing the Breyer Defence (1 e4 e5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ a6 4 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ b5 7 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 $\mathbb{Q}b8$), and later switching to the Zaitsev Variation (1 e4 e5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ a6 4 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ b5 7 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 10 d4 $\mathbb{Q}e8$). However, around the late 1980s, he started using the 4... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ Caro-Kann regularly, and this has since become his almost exclusive defence to 1 e4. In particular, he has played many games with the rather odd-looking variation 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{d}xe4$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}gf6$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ e6 7 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 8 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ h6 9 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ (D), which does not look terribly Karpovian at all, yet has become a firm favourite of his.



As White, Karpov has played exclusively 1 d4 for the past 15 years or so. However, it is interesting to note that up to the time of his world championship matches with Kasparov in

the mid-1980s, he had always been overwhelmingly a 1 e4 player. When examining some of the K-K opening duels in Chapter 5, I pointed out that Kasparov had started that series of matches as primarily a 1 d4 player, but had begun using 1 e4 as his main weapon by the end. Over the same period, Karpov made the opposite transition, starting out with 1 e4, but switching to 1 d4 when he found that he could not get the advantage against Kasparov's Sicilian. Just as Karpov has always believed in the Queen's Indian as Black, so as White he has always preferred to take on that opening, rather than allow the Nimzo. Indeed, if there is any one opening which Karpov has really made his own over the years, it is the Queen's Indian, in which his deep and subtle understanding has brought innumerable points on both sides of the board. Precisely because he has almost always answered 1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 e6 with 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$, you will find very few examples of the Exchange QGD in Karpov's games as White; as we noted earlier, the Exchange Variation does not work well with White's king's knight committed to f3 early on, and Karpov instead usually plays main-line QGDs as White.

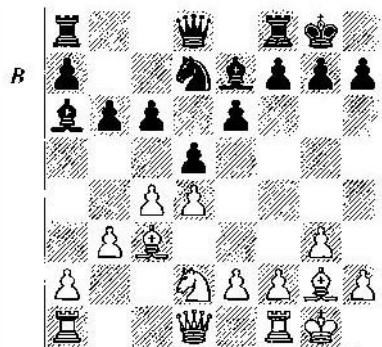
Karpov has always displayed a quite exceptional natural feeling for the Queen's Indian's nuances. In his early years, he generally played the main lines with ... $\mathbb{Q}b7$ as Black, but in more recent years the popular ... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ lines have become Karpov's home territory from both sides of the board.

The following is one recent example of his prowess in this variation:

Karpov – Adianto

Bali 2000

1 c4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 d4 e6 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ b6 4 g3 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 5 b3 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ c6 8 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 0-0 12 0-0 (D)



This position has arisen many times in the last two decades.

12... $\mathbb{Q}c8$

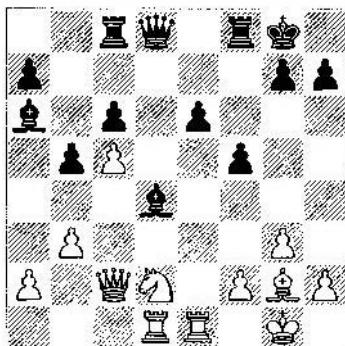
Karpov-Ehlvest, Bali 2000 took the following interesting course: 12... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 13 e4 b5 14 $\mathbb{Q}el$ dx e4 15 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$! 17 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$! $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 18 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 19 c5! $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ f5 21 $\mathbb{Q}p$! (D).

White has compensation for the pawn, in the shape of Black's bad a6-bishop and weak c6- and e6-pawns. After some errors by his opponent Karpov went on to win.

13 e4 dxc4

The old main line with 13...c5 has been the scene of countless other

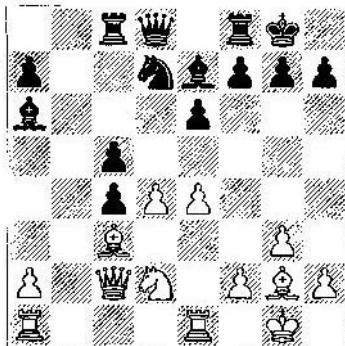
B



Karpov games. One recent outing saw him win with astonishing ease: 14 exd5 exd5 15 dxc5 dxc4 16 c6 cxb3 17 $\mathbb{E}e1$ b2 18 $\mathbb{A}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 19 $\mathbb{W}g4?$ (a poor innovation; 19 $\mathbb{A}b3$ and 19 $\mathbb{A}a3$ are better tries) 19... $\mathbb{A}f6$ 20 $\mathbb{A}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}e4?$ (losing a pawn for nothing, but the threats of ... $\mathbb{Q}d3$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}b5$ were already difficult to meet) 21... $\mathbb{W}xc6$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ and Black was simply a pawn up for nothing in Van der Sterren-Karpov, Wijk aan Zee 1998.

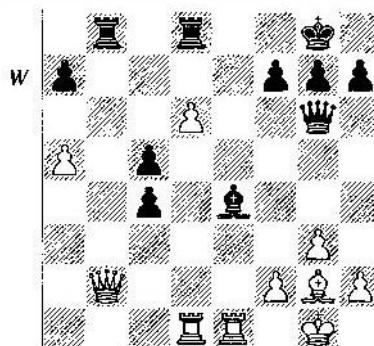
14 bxc4 b5 15 $\mathbb{E}e1$ bxc4 16 $\mathbb{W}c2$ c5?! (D)

W



This impatient central break allows White a powerful passed d-pawn. The superior 16... $\mathbb{W}c7$ brought Black equality in Karpov-Kasparov, London/Leningrad Wch (21) 1986.

17 d5 exd5 18 exd5 $\mathbb{E}f6$ 19 $\mathbb{E}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 20 $\mathbb{A}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 21 a4 $\mathbb{E}fd8$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{W}g6$ 23 d6 $\mathbb{A}b8$ 24 $\mathbb{W}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 25 a5 $\mathbb{A}a4$ 26 $\mathbb{W}a3$ $\mathbb{A}b2$?? 27 $\mathbb{W}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ (D)



28 $\mathbb{W}xb8!$

Although materially White will have only rook and bishop for the queen, the passed d-pawn will be decisive.

28... $\mathbb{A}xb8$ 29 $\mathbb{E}xe4$ f5 30 $\mathbb{E}xc4$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ 31 d7 $\mathbb{W}a6$ 32 $\mathbb{E}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}e2$ 33 $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{W}f7$ 34 $\mathbb{A}d5+$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 35 $\mathbb{E}el$ $\mathbb{W}d3$ 36 $\mathbb{E}ed1$ $\mathbb{W}e2$ 37 $\mathbb{A}c6$ g6 38 $\mathbb{E}el$ $\mathbb{W}d2$ 39 $\mathbb{E}cd1$ $\mathbb{W}c2$ 40 $\mathbb{E}d6+$ $\mathbb{W}f7$ 41 $\mathbb{E}e8$ 1-0

Vladimir Kramnik

White: 1 d4, 1 $\mathbb{Q}f3$

Black 1 e4: Ruy Lopez (Berlin), Petroff, Sveshnikov Sicilian, Classical Sicilian

Black 1 d4: Nimzo, QGD, Semi-Slav

The immediately striking thing about Kramnik's repertoire, compared with most of the players above, is how much more varied it is, particularly with Black. In this respect, Kramnik is typical of the current generation of super-GMs, who tend to use far more different openings than their predecessors. In fact, Kramnik is less varied than some of the others, which is partly why I have included him – if we tried to examine Anand's repertoire, for example, it would encompass at least half of all the main-line openings.

As White, Kramnik has varied between 1 d4 and 1 $\mathbb{Q}f3$. At the time of writing, he tends to be using 1 d4, as he was when he first broke through to the top level in 1991-2, but for a number of years between 1993-7, he almost exclusively used 1 $\mathbb{Q}f3$. He tended to use this primarily as a transpositional tool, often transposing back into regular queen's pawn openings, such as the QGD, King's Indian, etc., but at the same time avoiding certain other lines, such as the Benoni, Benko, Grünfeld (although sometimes he would go back into regular Grünfeld lines), etc. One of the lines with which Kramnik scored especially heavily was the anti-Nimzo-Indian system 1 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 e6 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 4 $\mathbb{W}c2$. This line bears a superficial similarity to the 4 $\mathbb{W}c2$ Nimzo, but here there is the important difference that White has not committed his d-pawn. This means that he retains the option of d3, keeping control of the e4-square, so often a basis for Black's counterplay in the

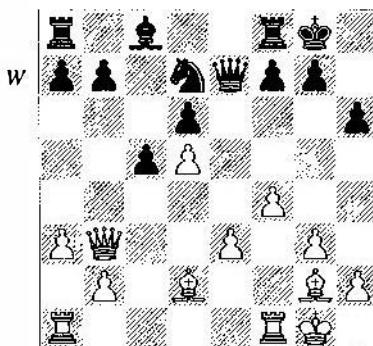
Nimzo-Indian, and it is much harder for Black to find the necessary counterplay to offset the surrender of the bishop-pair. A few of Kramnik's games in this line illustrate the point:

Kramnik – Ehlvest

Vienna 1996

1 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 c4 e6 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 4 $\mathbb{W}c2$

4 $\mathbb{W}b3$ is similar. Although the queen is not always so well placed on b3 as on c2, the move has the merit of forcing Black to play 4...c5, a move he may otherwise choose to delay or avoid altogether. Kramnik has used both queen moves, an example of 4 $\mathbb{W}b3$ being the following: 4...c5 5 g3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ 0-0 7 0-0 d6 8 d3 h6 9 e3 e5 10 a3 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}e7$?? 12 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 13 cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 15 d4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$?? 16 dx5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 17 f4 \pm $\mathbb{Q}d7$ (D).



18 e4 b6 19 $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ c4 21 $\mathbb{W}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 22 $\mathbb{W}g4$ f6 23 e5 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 24 $\mathbb{W}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 25 exf6 $\mathbb{W}c7$ 26 h3! gxf6 27 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$! $\mathbb{Q}xc1$ 28 $\mathbb{W}xe1$ $\mathbb{W}f7$ 29 $\mathbb{Q}c3$

Wg6 30 B.e7 Bf7 31 Bc8+ Bf8 32 B.e4
1-0 Kramnik-Hraček, Berlin 1996.

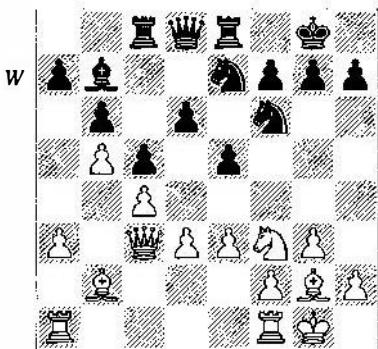
4...0-0

Against 4...c5 Kramnik introduced a promising pawn sacrifice: 5 a3 B.a5 6 g3 B.c6 7 B.g2 B.xc3 8 W.xc3 W.a5 9 b4!?. After 9...cxb4 10 axb4 Wxb4 11 Wxb4 B.xh4 12 B.d4 d5 13 B.a3 B.c6 14 B.b5 he had plenty of compensation, and went on to win handily in Kramnik-Romanishin, Belgrade 1993.

5 a3 B.xc3 6 W.xc3 c5 7 b4 b6 8 g3 B.c6

8...B.b7 9 B.g2 transposes to Kramnik-Illescas, Dos Hermanas 1997, in which Black preferred the more natural development of the knight on d7, but after 9...d6 10 0-0 B.bd7 11 B.b2 W.e7 12 d3 Bfc8 13 b5 a6 14 a4 axb5 15 axb5 W.f8 16 e4 White stood somewhat better.

9 B.g2 B.b7 10 0-0 d6 11 B.b2 e5 12 e3 B.c8 13 d3 B.e8? 14 b5! B.e7 (D)



Kramnik now initiated what proved to be favourable tactical complications with 15 Bxe5!?, but even in the absence of these, the simple 15 e4,

followed by 16 B.d2, would have given White a clear advantage.

1 B.f3 is extremely flexible, but the early commitment of the knight to f3 does cut out certain options. When Kramnik first came to prominence, he tended to use the Sämisch against the King's Indian, winning many excellent games with it. However, when he decided to start opening 1 B.f3, he was forced to find another anti-KID weapon. After a couple of successful years with the Petrosian System (1 d4 B.f6 2 c4 g6 3 B.c3 B.g7 4 e4 d6 5 B.f3 B-0 6 B.e2 e5 7 d5), including two victories over Kasparov, he took up the newly-popular Bayonet Variation referred to above, with equal success. As noted above, this line has been responsible for a sharp decline in the popularity of the King's Indian at the highest level.

The great range of black openings is in contrast with the approach of someone such as Kasparov. Whereas the latter has tended to be fairly predictable as Black (certainly until very recently), but more varied as White, Kramnik is rather the opposite, showing rather greater variety with the black pieces. I think this can be explained largely by the difference in style between himself and Kasparov. The latter is far more of a maximalist, who tends to be playing for a large advantage as White. For this reason, he is constantly searching for new paths, and thus has to vary his white openings a great deal. Kramnik, on the other hand, is rather less aggressive

and instead excels in exploiting relatively small positional advantages. Consequently, he is able and willing to play a smaller variety of openings as White, knowing that while he is unlikely to secure really big advantages much of the time, he is normally going to be able to count on a small edge at least, and this normally satisfies him.

As Black, on the other hand, he has tended to move over the years from sharper lines towards much more solid variations. Against 1 e4, for example, he played the Classical Sicilian a great deal during the early 1990s, and then switched to the highly-sharp Sveshnikov line (1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ e5 6 $\mathbb{Q}db5$ d6 7 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ a6 8 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ b5). However, over the last 5 years or so, along with other members of the super-tournament circuit, he has begun playing much less sharply as Black, instead aiming only for solid and drawish equality. To this end, he has played the Petroff extensively, and more recently the Berlin Defence, discussed in Chapter 3.

He has also shown similar flexibility as Black against 1 d4. In the early 1990s, he generally stuck faithfully to the Semi-Slav (1 d4 d5 2 e4 c6 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ e6), a favourite of a whole generation of ex-Soviets, including Shirov, Ivanchuk, Dreev, M.Gurevich, etc. However, as that opening has been progressively analysed almost to death, Kramnik gradually stopped playing it, and has instead used the Nimzo-Indian and QGD, plus occasional alternatives. It is notable, however, that with his solid and classically correct

style, he has hardly ever been tempted by openings such as the King's Indian or Grünfeld, and has instead made a healthy living by beating up such systems with White.

Michael Adams

White: 1 e4

Black 1 e4: 1...e5, Marshall Attack, etc.

Black 1 d4: Nimzo and Queen's Indian

Michael Adams is the last of the super-GMs whose repertoire we will be examining here. His style has always been strongly reminiscent of the Capablanca/Smyslov/Karpov school, in that it is based primarily on a superb natural instinct for where to place his pieces. In general, Adams shies away from ultra-sharp openings, and is normally content to seek a small advantage with White, and to play primarily for equality with the black pieces. This tendency has become even more clear in his play in recent years, since his career has concentrated on super-tournaments, where the emphasis is on winning with White and drawing with Black.

With White, Adams has always been a 1 e4 player, apart from a handful of experiments with the Trompowsky. At the time of writing, he usually plays main-line openings, such as the Ruy Lopez against 1...e5 and open Sicilians against 1...c5. However, until recently, he was notable amongst top GMs for being relatively reluctant to

enter into theoretical disputes, particularly in the Sicilian. To that end, he has played a number of offbeat lines against the Sicilian, including the Closed, 2 c3, and 1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3 $\mathbb{Q}c4$. Although he won many games against even world-class GMs with this approach, he has over the past couple of years begun to move away from such non-critical lines, in favour of main-line open Sicilians.

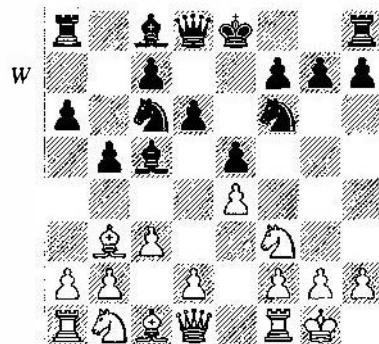
As Black, Adams's repertoire is marked principally by its solidity. After playing the Caro-Kann quite extensively in his youth, he gradually started playing 1...e5 more frequently, until it took over as his almost sole reply to 1 c4. One interesting point is that he now plays the Marshall Attack as his main defence, which may at first sight seem out of keeping with his generally solid approach as Black. However, contrary to its fearsome reputation, the Marshall has been analysed to such an extent at the top level that it is regarded by the leading players as primarily an equalizing weapon. There are many lines which lead to a forced draw, and White's problem is not in drawing against it, but in finding a way to secure some advantage. At the sort of super-tournament level at which Adams plays most of his chess, the Marshall is an ideal choice, but at lower levels, the presence of numerous drawing lines for White may make it unattractive to players who wish to play for a win as Black against weaker opponents. This is an issue to which we will return below, when we look at the repertoire of English GM Mark

Hebden. Adams's usual solution is to switch to the Møller/New Archangel lines (1 e4 e5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ a6 4 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 0-0, and now either 5...b5 6 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ or 5... $\mathbb{Q}c5$) when facing lower-rated opposition. The following is one very nice example:

Quillan – Adams

British League (4NCL) 1995/6

1 e4 e5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ a6 4 $\mathbb{Q}a4$
 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 0-0 b5 6 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 7 c3 d6 (D)



8 d4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}g5$

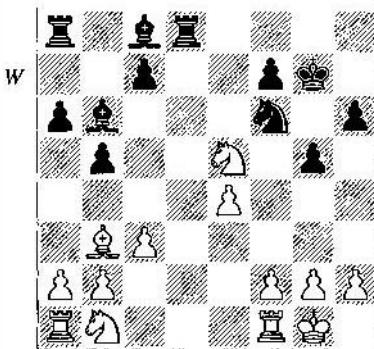
9 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 10 dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 12 gxf3 cxb6 13 f4 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 14 e5 dxe5 15 $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ bxc4 16 fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ with an unclear position was Wahls-Adams, Bundesliga 1994/5. Black eventually won.

Another disaster for White was 9 h3 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}el$ 0-0 11 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}cl$ d5 14 b3? dxe4 15 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 16 dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 18 g3 $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 20 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 21 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ 0-1 Morović-Adams, Santiago (6) 1997.

9...h6 10 ♜b4 g5 11 ♜g3 0-0 12 dx5?!

12 ♜bd2 cxd4 13 cxd4 ♜xd4 14 ♜xd4 ♜xd4 15 ♜f3 ♜b6 16 ♜c2 ♜h5 17 ♜d5 ♜xg3 18 hxg3 ♜b8 19 e5 ♜g7 20 ♜ad1 with compensation, J.Polgar-Adams, Dos Hermanas 1995.

12...♜xe5 13 ♜xe5 dxe5 14 ♜xd8 ♜xd8 15 ♜xc5 ♜g7!! (D)



16 a4 ♜e8 17 ♜d3 ♜b7! 18 e5 ♜g4 19 axb5 ♜e4! 20 ♜c4 ♜ad8? 21 h3 ♜xd3 22 ♜xd3 ♜xf2 23 ♜c4 axb5 24 ♜xb5 ♜xe5 25 ♜a3 ♜d2 26 ♜c4 ♜xb5 27 ♜xb6 ♜xh3+ 28 gxh3 ♜xb2! 0-1

Against 1 d4, Adams has played the Nimzo for virtually the whole of his career. The only significant exception was a brief period in the early 1990s, when he used the Benko Gambit. This was at a period of his career when he was playing in opens and relatively weak all-play-all events, and winning with Black was rather more of a priority. Once he started moving up to stronger events, and encountering top-class

GMs, his Benko began to suffer quite badly and he soon abandoned it. I remember personally witnessing two particularly severe defeats: Barev-Adams, Hastings 1991/2, and Timoshchenko-Adams, London Lloyds Bank 1992. With the Nimzo and Queen's Indian complex, however, Adams has been highly successful, and just as with Karpov, it is clear that these classically solid systems suit his style perfectly.

Mikhail Gurevich

White: 1 d4, 1 c4

Black 1 e4: French, Pirc

Black 1 d4: Semi-Slav, occasional Leningrad Dutch

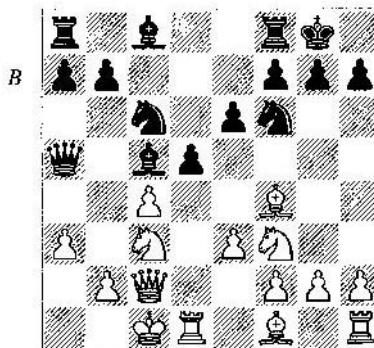
Thus far, with the exception of the inactive Fischer, all of the players whose repertoires we have examined are top-flight GMs, whose chess is almost all played in super-tournaments against other elite GMs. Gurevich, the former Soviet star now resident in Belgium, is in a somewhat different position. Although extremely strong, he is not one of the charmed circle who tend to monopolize the invitations to the top all-play-all events. Instead, he plays the majority of his chess in open tournaments, which means that his priorities are somewhat different. Rather than being faced with players of his own strength all of the time, Gurevich plays many games against weaker players, and the nature of open tournaments is such that it is frequently necessary to be able to win

against such players, regardless of colour. The classical 'win with White, draw with Black' approach rarely suffices for success in such events.

Faced with this problem, many players adopt very sharp systems, aiming to maximize winning prospects by stirring up early tactical imbalance. However, Gurevich is an outstanding example of how a sounder and more technical style can be equally effective, and his approach is reflected in his opening repertoire. He is basically a very correct player, who relies on outplaying opponents in strategically difficult positions and long endgames, rather than taking undue risks to create sharp positions. The effectiveness of such an approach, in the right hands, is shown by his results; over the past five years or so, he has won innumerable international opens throughout Europe, and in 2001 scored a Fischeresque 9/9 in the Belgian Championship.

As White, Gurevich usually opens 1 d4 or 1 c4. From my observation, he tends to use the latter move more often against the weaker opponents, probably because the flexibility and numerous move-order options in the English make it easier to lure such opponents into less familiar territory. Nonetheless, Gurevich is certainly not the sort of player who backs out of theoretical disputes. He has long enjoyed a reputation as one of the most erudite of GMs, and is certainly a world expert on many of his favourite lines, such as 4 $\mathbb{W}c2$ against the Nimzo and 5 $\mathbb{A}f4$ in the QGD.

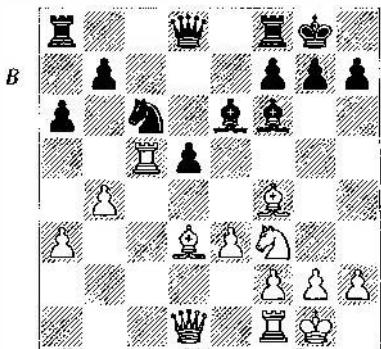
The latter in particular is a line in which Gurevich has won innumerable games and considerably enriched the theory. For example, after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 $\mathbb{D}c3$ $\mathbb{A}f6$ 4 $\mathbb{D}f3$ $\mathbb{A}e7$ 5 $\mathbb{A}f4$ 0-0 6 e3 c5 7 dx5 $\mathbb{A}xc5$ 8 a3 $\mathbb{A}c6$ 9 $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ it was Gurevich who invented the line beginning 10 0-0-0 (D).



Gurevich introduced this move in two games in the 1988 USSR Championship. The effect of surprise can be seen in the way Andrei Sokolov, runner-up to Karpov in the Candidates cycle only one year earlier, collapsed when faced with Gurevich's new idea: 10...dxc4 11 $\mathbb{A}xc4$ $\mathbb{A}e7$ 12 g4 b5? (current theory recommends 12...e5 as equalizing) 13 $\mathbb{A}xb5$ $\mathbb{A}b7$ 14 $\mathbb{D}d2$ $\mathbb{D}b4$ 15 axb4 $\mathbb{A}xb4$ 16 $\mathbb{A}c4$ $\mathbb{W}a1+$ 17 $\mathbb{D}d2$ $\mathbb{A}xc3+$ 18 $\mathbb{A}e2$ $\mathbb{W}a2$ 19 $\mathbb{A}a1$ 1-0 M.Gurevich-A.Sokolov, USSR Ch (Moscow) 1988.

Despite his initial success with 10 0-0-0, however, Gurevich has rarely played it since, generally preferring the quieter line 9 $\mathbb{A}e2$. After a subsequent pawn exchange on c4, this leads

to positions with a symmetrical pawn-structure, where White has a very small edge, based on his more active queen's bishop. It may not look like very much, but in practice it often proves to be the sort of nagging little edge that a superb technician such as Gurevich is able to exploit to the maximum. Yet another way to play the position is 9 $\mathbb{B}c1$, followed by an exchange on d5, leaving Black with an isolated d-pawn. One typical example of this is 9 $\mathbb{B}c1$ $\mathbb{A}e7$ 10 cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ exd5 12 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 13 0-0 $\mathbb{A}e6$ (13... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xh7+$ is better for White) 14 b4 a6 and now the thematic manoeuvre 15 $\mathbb{B}c5$ (*D*) left White with a small but steady edge in M.Gurevich-Peelen, Dutch Cht 1998.



Gurevich's repertoire as Black versus 1 e4 consists of the French and Pirc, and once again, he tends to use the Pirc more often against the weaker opponents. This makes good sense, since the Pirc/Modern complex allows a lot of flexibility and is harder to prepare specific sequences against, as

well as generally avoiding major early simplification. Nevertheless, Gurevich's main defence is the French, and here his choices are an excellent example of how one can have variety in one's repertoire without involving many different openings. Like almost all leading French players nowadays, Gurevich answers 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ with 3... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, rather than the Winawer. After 4 $\mathbb{Q}g5$, he almost always continues 4...dxe4 5 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$, but here there are several options for Black, all of which Gurevich uses. His most common choice is 5... $\mathbb{A}e7$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$, but he also uses the sharper recapture 6...gxf6, as well as the 5th move alternative 5... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$. Similarly, against the Tarrasch French (3 $\mathbb{Q}d2$), he generally eschews both the sharp 3... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ and the trendy 3... $\mathbb{A}e7$, in favour of the IQP positions reached after 3...c5 4 exd5 exd5. However, here too he varies his systems after 5 $\mathbb{Q}gf3$, generally choosing between 5... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ and 5...a6. Both lines usually lead to IQP structures for Black, but there are small differences between them, which makes specific preparation by White more difficult, while still allowing Gurevich to draw on his vast experience and understanding of the generic structure.

Against 1 d4, Gurevich sticks pretty faithfully to the Semi-Slav, but he does venture the occasional Leningrad Dutch. The latter is an excellent choice against weaker opponents, but it is notable that Gurevich uses it sparingly against grandmaster opposition. The Semi-Slav is a system which has

been analysed in enormous depth, and in which there is a huge range of move-orders and alternative set-ups. However, most of the choices lie with Black, which means that White often has to know far more than Black. By picking his own preferences, Black can narrow down the range of lines he needs to prepare, which makes the Semi-Slav a good practical choice. Gurevich is one of a whole generation of Soviet players brought up on this opening, and his vast knowledge and experience make it a formidable weapon in his hands.

Evgeny Sveshnikov

White: 1 e4 – c3 Sicilian, Evans Gambit, Advance French, etc.

Black 1 e4: Sicilian 4...e5

Black 1 d4: Semi-Slav

Sveshnikov is probably the single greatest contemporary example of a player with a truly fanatical belief in the correctness of his own ideas about openings. Throughout his career, he has remained faithful to virtually the same systems, and continues to uphold his beliefs, both in practical play and polemical discussions. Anybody who plays Sveshnikov can be 99% certain of the position which will be on the board after 10 moves or so, but he can also be equally sure that the same position has been on Sveshnikov's board in home analysis for countless hours during the past 30 years.

The theme which underpins all of Sveshnikov's opening systems is a

great belief in the value of the pawn-centre. Thus, he always opens 1 e4, and is firmly convinced that any reply which allows him to follow up with 2 d4 must already give White some advantage. On this basis, the French, Pirc, Caro-Kann, etc., are dismissed as inadequate for equality in Sveshnikov's scheme of things. Effectively, this leaves 1...e5 and 1...c5 as the only correct replies. His patronage of 2 c3 against the latter move is further evidence of his faith in the two-pawn centre, whereas to play the Open Sicilian would mean abandoning forever the chance of establishing an e4-d4 pawn-centre. It is interesting to note that in recent years, he has also begun experimenting with 2 f4 against the Sicilian (principally because of the extent to which 2 c3 has been analysed), but even here he never misses the chance to establish a big pawn-centre. After 2 f4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ g6, for example, he always continues 4 c3, rather than the 4 $\mathbb{Q}h5$ which is preferred by most f4 Sicilian players.

This attitude also applies as Black. Throughout his career, Sveshnikov has believed in the value of Black's central pawn-majority in the Open Sicilian, and he has always practised lines which involve the early advance ...e5. In these systems, Black makes immediate use of this central pawn-majority to secure control over key squares such as d4 and f4, and to squash any chance of a white central pawn advance with f4 and e5. Initially, Sveshnikov's attention was focussed on the highly sharp Pelikan Variation (1 e4

c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{N}f6$ 5 $\mathbb{Q}c3$ e5), and his contribution to this line was so great that the whole complex is nowadays often referred to as the Sveshnikov Variation. However, during the 1980s, the man himself switched to the alternative line 1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ e5. Although this had been known for many years under the appellation of the Löwenthal Variation, Sveshnikov's interpretation was radically new, in that he answered 5 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ with 5...d6 (rather than 5...a6, which characterizes the Löwenthal proper). The similarity of this new line (which has acquired the rather silly name of the Kalashnikov Variation) to the Sveshnikov Variation is clear, in that Black once again uses the e-pawn to establish central influence, at the cost of ceding the d5-square. However, in the Kalashnikov, the fact that Black's king's knight is not yet developed prevents White from pinning it with $\mathbb{Q}g5$. Instead, White has the extra option of clamping down on the d5-square with 6 c4, which leads to slower and altogether less sharp positions than those in the Sveshnikov Variation.

Sveshnikov has an almost fanatical belief in the correctness of his ideas in these lines, and is on record as claiming that after 1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ White's only try for an advantage is 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$. Although he has attracted few regular supporters (ironically, his former favourite the Sveshnikov Variation remains popular even at the highest level), there is no arguing with his own results – on my database, he

has scored almost 70% as Black in the Kalashnikov. The following thematic example is typical:

Smagin – Sveshnikov

Moscow 1992

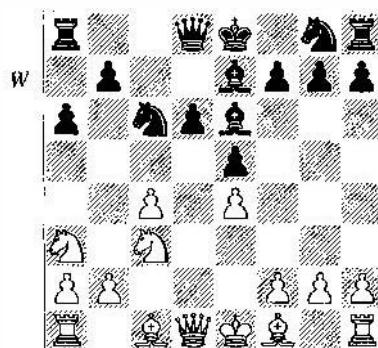
1 e4 c5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 d4 cxd4 4 $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ e5 5 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ d6 6 c4

Against 6 $\mathbb{Q}lc3$ a6 7 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ h5 8 $\mathbb{Q}d5$, Sveshnikov generally prefers 8... $\mathbb{Q}ce7$; e.g., 9 c4 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 10 $\mathbb{W}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 11 $\mathbb{W}b7$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 12 cxb5 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 13 $\mathbb{W}xa6$ d5 with compensation, Bologan-Sveshnikov, Riga 1995.

6... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 7 $\mathbb{Q}lc3$

7 $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 8 0-0 $\mathbb{E}c8$ 9 b3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}b2$ 0-0 11 $\mathbb{Q}lc3$ a6 12 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}ce3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 16 cxd5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ = Tiviakov-Sveshnikov, Podolsk 1993.

7...a6 8 $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ (D)



9 $\mathbb{Q}c2$

9 $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 11 $\mathbb{W}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 12 0-0 $\mathbb{E}c8$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 0-0 14 $\mathbb{Q}d1$! $\mathbb{W}c7$ 15 b3 b5 16 $\mathbb{Q}ed5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 18 cxd5 $\mathbb{W}c2$ 19 $\mathbb{W}g4$??

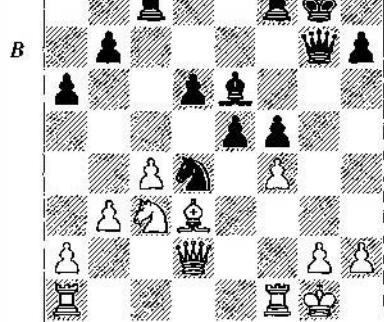
f5 20 exf5 h5 21 $\mathbb{W}f3$ e4 22 $\mathbb{W}xh5$ $\mathbb{B}xf5$ 0-1 Ulybin-Sveshnikov, USSR Cht (Naberezhnye Chelny) 1988.

Another alternative is 9 ♜d5 $\mathbb{B}c8$ 10 ♜e3 ♜g5 11 ♜b6 $\mathbb{W}d7$ 12 ♜e2 ♜d8 13 0-0 ♜ge7 14 ♜e3 0-0 15 c5 ♜d4 16 ♜xd4 exd4 17 cxd6 $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 18 ♜c4 $\mathbb{W}c5$ 19 b4 $\mathbb{W}a7$ 20 ♜cb6 $\mathbb{B}c6$ 21 ♜xe7+ ♜xe7 22 ♜d5 ♜xd5 23 exd5 $\mathbb{B}c3$ and Black is better, Oli-Sveshnikov, Helsinki 1992.

9... $\mathbb{B}g5$

A standard strategic idea in these positions. Black exchanges his bad bishop and weakens White's dark squares.

10 ♜e3 ♜ge7 11 ♜e2 ♜d4 12 0-0 0-0 13 ♜d3 $\mathbb{B}c8$ 14 ♜d2 g6 15 b3 f5 16 ♜xf5 ♜exf5 17 exf5 gxf5 18 ♜.xg5 $\mathbb{W}xg5$ 19 f4 $\mathbb{W}g7$ 20 $\mathbb{W}d2$ (D)



20...b5! 21 $\mathbb{B}ael$ bxc4 22 $\mathbb{B}xc4$ $\mathbb{B}xc4$ 23 bxc4 $\mathbb{B}xc4$
...and Black won.

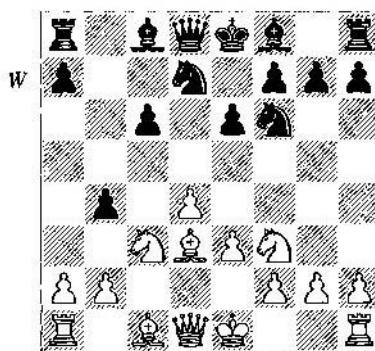
Against 1 d4, Sveshnikov is another ex-Soviet player who has used the Semi-Slav all of his life. However, he

tends to prefer slightly less fashionable lines than those played by most other Semi-Slav practitioners. For example, in the Meran Variation after 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♜f3 ♜f6 4 ♜c3 e6 5 e3 ♜bd7 6 ♜d3 dxc4 7 ♜xc4 b5 8 ♜d3, the most popular moves are 8...a6 and 8... $\mathbb{B}b7$. Sveshnikov, however, has generally preferred 8...b4, a line which does not enjoy so good a reputation. Once again, however, he has his own ideas, and has been successful in upholding them in practice, as in the following examples:

Dreev – Sveshnikov

Russian Cht (Podolsk) 1992

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♜f3 ♜f6 4 ♜c3 c6 5 e3 ♜bd7 6 ♜d3 dxc4 7 ♜xc4 b5 8 ♜d3 b4 (D)



9 ♜e4 c5

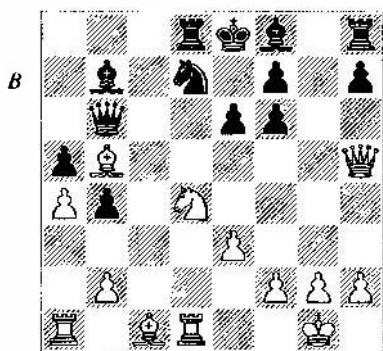
In more recent years, Sveshnikov has preferred 9... $\mathbb{B}xg4$; e.g., 10 ♜xe4 $\mathbb{W}b6$ 11 $\mathbb{W}a4$ ♜b7 12 ♜d2 $\mathbb{B}c8$ 13 a3 (13 ♜c4 $\mathbb{W}a6$ 14 $\mathbb{W}xa6$ ♜xa6 15 ♜d3 c5 16 ♜d6+ ♜xd6 17 ♜xa6 $\mathbb{B}c7$ is

equal, Baikov-Sveshnikov, Russian Ch (Elista) 2001) 13...c5?! 14 dxc5 ♜xc5 15 axb4 ♜xb4 16 0-0 ♜c7! 17 ♜xb7?! ♜xb7 18 ♜b3 0-0 19 ♜d1 ♜b8 with an edge for Black, Yakovich-Sveshnikov. Erevan 1996.

10 ♜xf6+ gxf6?! **11 0-0**

NCO suggests either 11 ♜e4 or 11 e4. The former proved unsuccessful in Lugovoi-Sveshnikov, Novgorod 1995: 11 ♜e4 ♜b8 12 ♜f5 13 ♜c6 ♜c7 14 d5 ♜g7 15 e4 fxe4 16 ♜g5 0-0 17 ♜xd7 ♜xd7 18 ♜xe4 c4! and Black's bishop-pair and queenside majority proved more important than White's kingside chances.

11...cxd4 12 ♜xd4 ♜b6 13 a4 a5 14 ♜b5 ♜b7 15 ♜h5?! ♜d8 16 ♜d1 (D)



16...♜g8! 17 g3 ♜g5! 18 ♜xh7 ♜d5! 19 b3 ♜c5 20 ♜b2 ♜e7 21 ♜e2 ♜e5 22 ♜h4 ♜xd4! 23 ♜xd4 ♜xd4 24 exd4 ♜c6 25 d5 ♜xd5 26 f3 ♜xd1+ 27 ♜xd1 ♜xf3+ 28 ♜xf3 ♜xf3 29 ♜d2 0-1

White lost on time. His king is hunted to extinction after 29...♜h1+.

30 ♜f2 ♜g2+ 31 ♜e1 ♜g1+ 32 ♜e2 ♜a6+ 33 ♜f3 ♜h1+ 34 ♜g4 ♜e4+ 35 ♜h3 ♜f1+.

One interesting point about Sveshnikov's use of the Semi-Slav is move-order. With a few exceptions, Sveshnikov has generally preferred the order 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♜c3 c6. After 4 ♜f3, Black has the additional option of playing 4...dxc4 (4...♜f6 is the Semi-Slav), leading to the complicated and very interesting Abrahams/Noteboom Variation, the main line of which runs 5 e3 ♜b4 6 a4 b5 7 ♜d2 ♜h7 8 axb5 ♜xc3 9 ♜xc3 cxb5 10 b3 a5 11 bxc4 b4 12 ♜b2 ♜f6. However, the drawback of Sveshnikov's move-order is that White can offer the sharp Marshall Gambit with 4 e4. After the further moves 4...dxe4 5 ♜xe4 ♜b4+ 6 ♜d2 ♜xd4 7 ♜xh4 ♜xe4+ 8 ♜e2 practice suggests that White has good compensation. For this reason, most Semi-Slav practitioners (including Mikhail Gurevich, discussed above) prefer to enter the opening via a Slav move-order: 1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♜f3 ♜f6 4 ♜c3 e6. This allows White the option of the Exchange Slav with 4 cxd5 (or 3 cxd5), but although this variation is rather tedious if Black is trying to win, it certainly is nothing like so dangerous as the Marshall Gambit.

Mark Hebden

White: 1 d4 – Barry Attack, Torre Attack

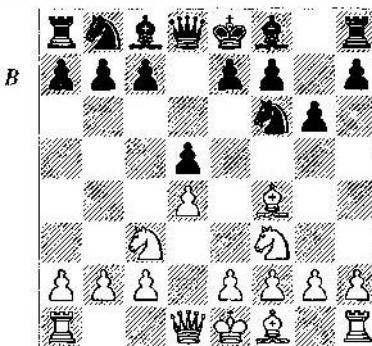
Black 1 e4: 1...e5, Closed Lopez, etc.

Black 1 d4: King's Indian

The final player whose repertoire we are going to examine is the English GM Mark Hebden. Mark plays virtually all of his chess in open events, and in particular in weekend Swiss events in England. When discussing Mikhail Gurevich's repertoire above, I made the point that success in open events requires the ability to score heavily against weaker players, regardless of colour. This is even more true in five-round and six-round weekend events, where a player can rarely afford to drop more than one draw if he is to count on first place. Hebden has been the most consistently successful weekend tournament player in England over the past 20 years, and his repertoire is perfectly suited to such events.

Mark's greatest strength is his ability to take relatively little-known and apparently harmless lines, and turn them into something much more fearsome than they appear. In his youth, he did this with the 2 f4 Sicilian (now generally called the Grand Prix Attack), which had long been regarded as a quiet and tame variation. When he switched to 1 d4 in the late-1980s, he alighted on the line 1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ g6 3 $\mathbb{N}c3$ d5 4 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ (D).

This had been known for decades (Capablanca used it to beat Yates at New York 1924, for example), but was generally played in quiet fashion, similar to the London System. Mark's innovation was to interpret the line much more aggressively, often castling queenside and launching a kingside pawn-storm if Black develops too slowly; for example, 4... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 5 e3 0-0



6 ♕e2 (Capablanca played the slower 6 h3) 6...b6?! 7 ♔e5! ♜b7 8 h4!. Over the years, Mark has gradually refined this so-called Barry Attack to the point where he has been able to claim many grandmaster scalps with it, culminating in victories against John Nunn in two consecutive Hastings Premier tournaments:

Hebden – Nunn

Hastings 1996/7

1 d4 ♜f6 2 ♛f3 g6 3 ♜c3 d5 4 ♜f4
♝g7 5 e3 0-0 6 ♜e2 c5

The slower 6...b6 allows White to initiate a strong kingside attack after 7 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 8 $h4$, one brutal example of which went 8... $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ 9 $h5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 11 $dx5$ $c5$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $e6$ 13 $hxg6$ $fxg6$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 15 $f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16 0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c6?$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 1-0 Hebden-Likavsky, Cappelle la Grande 1992.

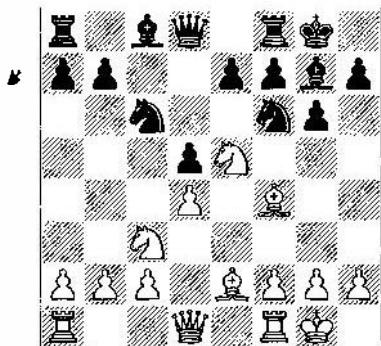
7 e5

This move was Hebden's improvement over the older 7 $dxc5$, after which 7... $\mathbb{Q}bd7$! is a good reply.

7... c6

One year later, Nunn tried 7...cxd4 but lost to a neat tactic after 8 exd4 $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ 9 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 10 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}fd7$ 11 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 12 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}h5?!$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 16 0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 17 f4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18 g4 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 19 a3 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 20 fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xc3?$ 21 exf6 $\mathbb{Q}fc8$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}bl!$ $\mathbb{Q}xc2?$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}d2!$ 1-0 Hebden-Nunn, Hastings 1997/8.

8 0-0 cxd4 9 exd4 (D)



9... $\mathbb{Q}a5$

In Hebden-Farndon, Isle of Man 1999, Black preferred 9... $\mathbb{Q}a5$, but after 10 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 11 a3 a6 12 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 13 $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 15 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 16 c3 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 17 h3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 18 g4 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 20 b4 a5 21 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ White was well in command.

10 $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 11 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 12 c3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 13 b4 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 14 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ e5 15 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ 16 $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 17 $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 18 dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 19 $\mathbb{Q}d2$ a5 20 $\mathbb{Q}f1$ axb4 21 cxb4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 22 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 23 $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 24 $\mathbb{Q}c5$

White's grip on the dark squares and outside passed a-pawn give him a clear advantage.

Another home-brewed system which has brought Hebden great success is his interpretation of the Torre Attack after 1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ c6 3 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ c5. The usual continuation now is 4 e3, but after the sharpest reply 4... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ White is forced to choose between the ungainly 5 $\mathbb{Q}c1$ and the speculative pawn sacrifice 5 $\mathbb{Q}bd2$. Neither of these lines suits Mark's style, and he instead prefers 4 c3, after which 4... $\mathbb{Q}b6$ can be met by 5 $\mathbb{Q}bd2!$, when it is very risky to take on b2, while 4...cxd4 5 cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ can be answered more naturally by 6 $\mathbb{Q}c2$. Even so, the Torre is hardly the most fearsome of openings, but Hebden has shown that it possesses an unexpected drop of poison.

A key element in Mark's repertoire is his clever use of move-orders. Every possible scenario and move-order is carefully worked out, and he is well-nigh impossible to catch out. Since he always answers 1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ with 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$, he is able to avoid the Benko by playing the line we discussed in Chapter 5 (1 d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ c5 3 d5 b5 4 $\mathbb{Q}g5$), while against 2...c5 3 d5 e6, seeking a Modern Benoni, he has the option of 4 $\mathbb{Q}c3$, producing yet another position on which established theory has little to say, but which Hebden has played and analysed extensively.

As Black, Hebden uses far fewer home-made systems, generally sticking to main lines after 1...e5 and in the King's Indian. However, his use of move-orders to keep opponents off balance can be seen here too. In the main-line Lopez, Hebden started off his career as a faithful practitioner of

the Marshall Attack (1 e4 e5 2 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3 $\mathbb{Q}b5$ a6 4 $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 6 $\mathbb{Q}el$ b5 7 $\mathbb{Q}b3$ 0-0 8 c3 d5), but in recent years has tended to prefer normal Closed Lopez lines. However, he still uses the Marshall move-order 7...0-0, thus forcing his opponents to consider whether they are prepared to allow the Marshall with 8 a4 (or other moves, such as 8 d4, 8 h3, 8 d3, etc.), but in

general these lines probably offer White less advantage against a well-prepared player than do the main lines of the Closed Lopez. Thus, by feinting at a Marshall, Hebden is frequently able to bluff his opponents into avoiding 8 c3, and the fact that he does still occasionally venture the Marshall proper means that opponents who are not prepared to face it cannot risk calling his bluff.

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